

Out of the Balkan puzzle

**Improving
Ethnic Relations in
Southeast Europe**

**A capacity building,
learning oriented and
development grants
programme**



A partnership of the
King Baudouin Foundation,
the Soros Foundations and
the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation

Published by the King Baudouin Foundation, rue Brederodestraat 21, 1000 Brussels

Editor

Guido Knops, King Baudouin Foundation

Coordination

Jan Balliu, King Baudouin Foundation

Mariana Milosheva, Regional Consultant to the programme

Editing

Andrey Ivanov

Liz Harrison

Final editing

Bailleul – Gent/Belgium

Contributions from

Mariana Milosheva, Civic Initiatives (Serbia), Human Development Promotion Centre (Albania), Inter-Ethnic Initiative for Human Rights Foundation (Bulgaria), Ethno-cultural Diversity Resource Centre (Romania) and Foundation Open Society Institute – Macedonia

Photography

Ana Adamovic, Ballazs Attila, Imre Sabo, Radu Ghitulescu, Rares Beuran, Vesna Pavlovic

Graphic Design

Bailleul – Gent/Belgium

Print

Vanmelle – Gent/Belgium

D/2002/2848/08

ISBN: 2-87212-394-6

Acknowledgments

The King Baudouin Foundation would like to thank all its partners for their commitment and efforts to make this programme possible.

As it is impossible to mention them by name, a special mention is due to all NGO's and individuals in the local communities; without their belief and energy the story of this book could not have been told.

The country chapters were provided for by the coordinating partner organisations and do not necessarily reflect the position of the National Soros Foundations, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation or the King Baudouin Foundation.

The Foundation has tried to contact all those who own copyright over the illustrations in this publication. Should any photographs have been printed without foreknowledge by the rightful claimants, they may contact the King Baudouin Foundation, rue Brederodestraat 21, 1000 Brussels.

Preface			4
Introduction: Why such a programme?			7
Albania	13	The implementing partner	14
		Different levels of integration	15
		“The government policy towards minorities”	17
		Bringing people together	17
		Promoting grassroots organisations	19
		“Looking at yourself through the eyes of others”	20
		Increasing community participation	21
		More involvement of local authorities	22
		The importance of media	22
		Flexible implementation approach	23
		Inter-community and intra-community involvement	23
Bulgaria	25	The IEI Foundation in the mirror	26
		How to discriminate against discrimination: a practical programme for inter-ethnic solidarity	27
		Ethnic tolerance or just conformity? The challenge	27
		Putting together a solution	29
		No more cultural self-censorship	30
		Coming out of our ethnic closet	31
		A way out of apathy	31
		A slap in the face of prejudice	33
		When tolerance means generosity	34
		Making new tracks	36
Macedonia	37	The implementing partner	38
		Living in Parallel Worlds	39
		Recent history written in blood	39
		The less-televised minorities	42
		“The magic of ALMATUROBO”	43
		Coexistence through common practices	45
Romania	47	“The creative partnership”	48
		Building on diversity	49
		Learning on the run	50
		Community development: the complementary link	52
		Each community takes its own time – The “special case” of Vasile Alecsandri	54
		The discovery of nation-wide community initiatives	55
		Challenging bias through acting together	57
		Achievements	58
Serbia	59	Bridging communities for nation-wide change	60
		The country context: key issues and challenges	61
		“The legal framework for minority rights”	61
		“Vovjodina: a possible model”	63
		From strategy to action, despite the challenges	64
		“From communication to interaction”	66
		The accomplishments	67
Instead of “Conclusions”, learning while fitting together the pieces			69
Contact information			75
Charles Stewart Mott Foundation in Central/Eastern Europe and Russia			77
Soros Foundations Network			78
King Baudouin Foundation			79

Preface

The southeastern corner of Europe has historically been referred to by those outside the region as *the Balkans*. Beyond geography, the name is loaded with many negative connotations. The Balkans and “Balkanisation” are associated with wars, conflict, hatred, division, fights and corruption. The region is also associated with problems and threats and it is probably for this reason that the approach in addressing this part of Europe has traditionally been that of *damage limitation and the confinement of problems that might pose a threat to the rest of Europe*.

Over the last decade the effects of the fall of the Berlin Wall in the Balkans have reconfirmed negative connotations of this region as a “dangerous place”, leaving the West puzzled and confused about how to approach it. The post-Kosovo Balkans have been redefined as Southeast Europe, but once again, the name has more than geographical implications. Covering the countries included in the “Stability Pact”, the region is today looking to the future and searching for a new vision based on security, stability and cooperation¹.

There are many on-going efforts to find a way out of the old Balkan puzzle. The international community, governments, civil society organisations, outsiders and insiders, researchers and practitioners are striving for new approaches and new solutions.

At the core of the puzzle is the issue of relations between the various ethnic and religious groups and how they evolve against a backdrop of increasing economic, social and political hardship in the region.

This book takes a brief look at one of the programmes that is trying to tackle this issue. *Improving Ethnic Relations in Southeast Europe* is in fact a partnership effort, regionally coordinated by the King Baudouin Foundation². The programme brings together the financial efforts of the King Baudouin Foundation, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and the respective national Soros Foundations. At in-country level the programme is coordinated and

1 Human security in Southeast Europe, UNDP Special Report, 1999

2 The King Baudouin Foundation initiated the programme in 1996. It began in 9 countries and by 1998 had expanded to a total of 15 countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Since the end of 1999, the programme has focused on SEE and is currently operational in Albania, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Romania and Serbia.

owned by the national partners of the King Baudouin Foundation, including the Human Development Promotion Centre (Albania), the Interethnic Initiative for Human Rights Foundation (Bulgaria), the Foundation Open Society Institute Macedonia and Civic Initiatives (Serbia), whilst in Romania, the Ethnocultural Diversity Resource Centre established a partnership with the Pro-Europe League, the Romanian Association for Community Development and the Gamma Foundation.

We call this partnership programme a *capacity building, learning-oriented and development grants programme*. Beyond the terms of the technical programme, our aim is to identify and nurture local citizen-based potential, so as to redefine a history based on ethnic prejudice, hatred and clashes.



This publication is an attempt to share some of the experience gained over recent years in creating an alternative approach that addresses one of the most vulnerable and sensitive issues in the region. It collects together the learning notes of all of our partners in our journey to reach out to people and relate to them in their everyday life. This is not a social research or policy paper, but rather a photograph, a picture of where the programme is now. Nevertheless, it already reflects the learning acquired to date during the first stage of a necessarily long-term effort to create new, community-based answers to old Balkan challenges.

Like every other step in the programme implementation, this book has been developed jointly with all of our partners. Our in-country partners have provided the design and content of each country chapter. They share with you their views and lessons learned to date, in function of the situation in their country and the approach they have adopted to address that situation. In addition to the achievements accomplished, we also wanted to highlight the challenges we have encountered in the various communities in each of the countries.

This publication is not a full report on the programme's coverage. Instead, it sets out to capture the feelings encountered whilst trying to bring about change and our learning from that change. You will also hear from some of the people themselves in the communities where initiatives are supported, voices that rarely feature in the framework of reports.

We hope that all of those who are trying to build a future for Southeast Europe in the Balkans will find what follows of interest.

Introduction: Why such a programme?

The challenge of diversity

If there is one thing that stands out above all else in this region, it is diversity. Each country is a colourful patchwork of ethnic groups, cultures, languages and religions. Churches and mosques have sometimes succeeded each other; others have coexisted for centuries. The picture changes from district to district within each country. Mixed communities follow “mono-ethnic” communities; a majority in one region is a minority in the next and so on.

An important part of this region’s history is its long legacy of addressing diversity and minority rights as a problem, the threat and various unrealised dreams of nation building and the long and related history of exclusion and division of ethnically diverse communities. Each country has its own layers of more or less painful memories, including the period behind the Berlin Wall, when “equality” was translated in various ways, but usually with the result of suppressing diversity.

Over the last decade the countries of Southeast Europe have been striving to redefine their political, social and economic environments, gradually moving them towards democracy. Transition is never easy, especially if one has to navigate between burdensome and deep-rooted memories, as well as the new wounds from the revived tradition of fights, exclusion and hatred between different ethnic groups. The new legacy of addressing diversity varies from country to country. Some countries were devastated by the four Yugoslav wars of 1991-1999, in which thousands of people were killed and millions more displaced, sometimes within their own countries, sometimes across national frontiers as refugees. Other countries managed to get through a “dangerous” peace³, officially staying out of these wars, but suffering their effects more or less directly and severely. Yet throughout the wars and still now, beyond these country differences, there remains a common thread across them all: the situation of the Roma. Whilst remaining outside the discourse of national minorities in the region, the Roma face increasing social, political and economic exclusion, with everything that this entails.

The last decade has shown us that smouldering prejudice and bias can easily be politically activated into hatred and combat, especially in an environment of unstable democracies, economic hardship and personal insecurity. The situation is very dynamic and can change rapidly. Peaceful communities, regions or countries can shift to tension or conflicts of varying intensity, sometimes with alarming speed, and on some occasions lead to painful new wounds in inter-ethnic relations.

Within this context, investment in improving inter-ethnic relations is a long-term priority for the sustainability of democracy and peace in the region. It requires long-term development assistance to help cultivate the practices of dialogue and understanding in ethnically diverse communities, as well as changes in attitudes within institutions and society at large.

The challenge is, how to do it? How to redefine diversity, transforming it onto an asset instead of a problem? How to build a new tradition and a critical mass of understanding, practising and living the values of human rights and tolerance? Where to start?

The programme: designing approaches from inside out

From the outset, The King Baudouin Foundation has considered human rights and diversity as being, together, a crosscutting issue for civil society. From the beginning too, a partnership was established with the respective national Soros Foundations in each of the countries covered. The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation joined the programme in 1997.

The Programme began as a large-scale effort to find and develop creative projects in nine (1996) and subsequently fifteen countries (in 1998) in Central and Eastern Europe. To be able to cover such a geographically large region, the programme was coordinated regionally by the King Baudouin Foundation and at country level by the respective national Soros Foundations. Between the start and 1999, the programme supported more than 230 local projects, in 15 countries, covering a wide range of fields concerned with inter-ethnic relations. Some initiatives involved national research or conferences; others were more local, in the fields of media, intercultural education and culture. As a support measure for the local projects, the programme also provided for

eight regional meetings, bringing participants together to discuss practices and receive further training on various aspects.

In 1999, based on learning from previous years, the King Baudouin Foundation and its partners began thinking about how to respond better to changes and needs in the region. The first decision was to narrow the geographical scope of the programme and to work in only seven countries, namely those considered to be the most vulnerable societies. Secondly, it was agreed that there was a need to redesign the approach and identify ways of becoming more deeply involved in providing development assistance to initiatives at community level and, based on such an approach, to reach out to the public at large.

It is often the practice of donors to design their strategies and then invite local organisations to apply for aid and be obliged to accommodate their work in function of these outside assumptions. We decided to adopt a different approach. The King Baudouin Foundation's team invested considerably more time in strategy development, treating this as a participatory process during which people from the region contributed their own input and ideas. Some of the contributors to the strategy had been involved in previous years of the programme as donors (the Soros Foundations), trainers, or as participants in supported projects. Others had been active in other human rights or community development projects in various localities.

The main idea was to secure as wide a perspective as possible, combining local experience and practice from inside and outside of the programme, and to listen carefully to what people from the region had to say. This sometimes involved being very critical about donors' approaches to the inter-ethnic enigma in their countries. Some might argue that consultative processes are a luxury when time is limited, but at the end of the day, we found this investment worthwhile. We all know that providing grants to local initiatives is only one aspect of support. We believed then, as we do now, that *how* this support is provided, as well as the on-going learning and updating of approaches and requirements to meet the rapid changes of local environments, are equally important. The best source for such learning is the people who live in and have experience of the local environments.

The consultative process, which took more than a year, examined how one could make a difference with limited resources and when dealing with such a complex issue as improving inter-ethnic relations. The process resulted in the formulation of general strategic guidelines⁴, which included (in brief) the following:

- To nurture community initiatives as a means of demonstrating the potential of a community-based “dialogue for action” approach to improve relations in diverse communities.
- To create sustainable practices for networking, sharing, learning and joint actions in communities and, at national level, to educate the public, institutions and the media about possible alternatives to current practice.
- To enhance links and communication at regional level so as to disseminate practices that have been seen to work, to learn from each other and to help others to learn from our experience.

A key to the success of the programme is the national coordinating partners. We imagined our partners as creative and devoted local organisations or groups of organisations which would be:

- open to learning and partnership with others;
- committed to working together at community level, to human rights and respect for others as a crosscutting issue of civil society;
- experienced in providing small grants and development assistance;
- able to think strategically, responding to real needs and rapid environmental changes;
- open to learn from other communities and
- able to develop with them advocacy and public campaigns.

The identification of such partners was not easy. It was a process we began in 2000 with Bulgaria and Romania, and continued in 2001 with Albania and Serbia. The process of partner identification in Macedonia was hampered by the crises there but this has now been finalised after a six-month development phase. In Croatia we have begun a feasibility study.

Whilst following the overall strategic direction of the programme, each partner developed its own strategy in function of local priorities, needs and opportunities.

⁴ The full text of the general strategy of the programme is published on the website of the King Baudouin Foundation (www.kbs-frb.be).

Looking back at this process of trying to identify what would best make a difference, and seeing the result of mutual discovery with the local partners, we can now see that the efforts of the last years have been a worthwhile investment of time and resources.

It is always encouraging to feel one is more than just a donor, that one is part of a community of people devoted to change and learning from change. The next chapters share the stories of our partners in the five countries and set out their thoughts on the achievements and challenges they have faced over the last twelve months.

The programme aims to improve inter-ethnic relations in SEE through the provision of:

- Support to community-based dialogue initiatives through (development) grants and technical assistance.
- Increased grassroots capacities through national networking, training and technical assistance for linkage, sharing and learning from each other.
- Enhanced local organisation capacities through regional exchanges, issue-based discussions and contact with similar organisations to conduct joint initiatives.
- The development and implementation of a continuous cycle of learning through monitoring and evaluation (including impact assessment).

The core of the programme approach is the development of a *community-based dialogue in ethnically diverse communities*. This means the development of effective *citizen* initiatives comprising:

- citizens' involvement and participation in identifying problems and potential solutions at community level;
- bringing together different interests around common issues and acting jointly with other community groups/NGO's to address them;
- an ability to dialogue with local government and advocate citizens' interests and concerns;
- communicating to the "outside" (the community or society at large) through the media or public campaigns involving national NGO's and networks.



Albania

The implementing partner

The Human Development Promotion Center (HDPC) is an Albanian non-governmental non-profit organisation. HDPC is independent, impartial and does not discriminate on the basis of religion, race or gender. Its main objective is to assist human development in Albania through the promotion of the active participation of society in the process of political, economic and social reform. With its knowledge of the stage of development, the traditional values and mentality of Albanian society, HDPC is involved in projects which guarantee sustainability to deprived people, particularly from the perspective of human rights and poverty alleviation.



HDPC has assembled a staff charged with, and devoted to, building and consolidating the image of a highly professional Albanian institution. The staff includes experienced and committed full- and part-time professionals who have graduated in fields such as economics, social sciences, management and planning and information technology. Most have graduated and trained abroad and had successful careers in their current or previous engagements. HDPC also has an active network of experts and consultants who are available upon request. Thanks to the implementation of previous projects, HDPC is present or has its own coordinators in most of the cities throughout Albania.

HDPC's work focuses on social and economic research, monitoring human development indicators, regional and national surveys, strategic development in various fields, the promotion of national capacities to manage foreign financial resources and the management of all components of economic and social projects. The results of our work have been published in various national and international publications. HDPC has been involved as an implementing partner organisation in the "Improvement of Inter Ethnic Relations in Southeastern Europe" since 2000.

Albania

Different levels of integration

Albania has a population of about 3 million people, living in a territory of 28,748 square kilometres, 75% of which are mountain areas. It has a young population compared with other European Countries, with an average age of 28.6 years.

The country opened up in the early 1990's and experienced substantial changes in its social, political and economic structure. The transition to new forms of organisation is proving very difficult and is frequently exposed to crises. There is a great deal of poverty in the country and there are significant regional disparities. Over the last ten years, internal migration and emigration have been one of the most dramatic features of transition in Albania.

Ethnic Albanians comprised a stable 93% of the population between 1960 and 1990. The remaining 7% comprised a small number of ethnic Greeks (about 1.9%), Macedonians (0.15%), Montenegrins, and Roma. About 97% of the Greek minority were based mainly in the southern regions of Gjirokastra, Saranda and Delvina. In Gjirokastra and Saranda, they represented a relatively significant part of the total population. The ethnic Macedonians were mainly settled in small villages close to Prespa e Vogel in southeastern Albania. The Montenegrin minority lived in a village near Shkodra until 1991, when some of them moved to Montenegro.

Roma (gypsies) have lived in Albania for many years, mainly in areas such as Tirana, Korça, Permeti and Elbasan. The Vlachs have lived here for centuries, scattered around most of central and southern Albania, although there are few precise figures about this minority. The Vlachs have established working, family and social relationships with other members of the population and are today the most integrated minority within the Albanian population.

As far as religious affiliation is concerned, three main religions are present in Albania: Islam, the Orthodox Church and Roman Catholicism. According to official statistics at the time of World War II, about 70% of Albanians were

Muslims, 17-20% Orthodox and 10-13% Roman Catholic. There is also a Bektashi community that comprises about one quarter of all Muslims in Albania. Although the population is mixed, Muslims are generally located in central and northeast Albania, Orthodox in the South and Catholics in the north. While Roman Catholics live in a closed community, Muslims and Orthodox, especially in the cities, experience a much higher rate of intermarriage. There is a considerable number of Orthodox-Muslim and Orthodox-Catholic marriages, but intermarriage between Muslims and Catholics has always been rare.

Despite their relative concentration, the various minority groups in Albania do not enjoy the same living conditions. There are cases when, even within the same minority group, living conditions vary from location to location, although most groups appear to maintain certain traditions in organising their lives. Poverty and social exclusion are not “reserved” for one ethnicity or one religious affiliation. Common problems therefore emphasise the importance of the relationships and interaction between the groups. A poor economic situation and the complex regional political climate aggravate the high level of fragility and sensitivity in relations between different communities. Nevertheless, it has been evident for decades that in Albania there is a lack of ethnic conflicts not only because of government policy, but also much more on account of traditional relations between the various groups.

The most important issue regarding minorities in Albania is their level of integration and participation. It is especially low among the Roma and Egyptian minorities. Despite the general spirit of willingness and cooperation, problems between different ethnic groups do exist and establishing a mentality of dialogue appears to be difficult. Some problems arise or are influenced by politics or “nationalism” and experience shows that, unless permanent attention is paid to this and without systematic intervention at local level to promote dialogue and tolerance, there will always be a risk of isolated cases being turned into significant local disturbances.

“The government policy towards minorities”

In 1995, Albania ratified the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. The Albanian Constitution recognises as crucial “pluralism, national identity and national heritage, coexistence of religions, as well as coexistence and understanding between Albanians and minorities” (Article 3). It considers the minorities as an integral part of Albanian society. The Constitution guarantees equality before the law and gives everyone the right to express themselves freely and without discrimination on account of ethnic, cultural, religious or linguistic reasons. The Albanian government is currently working for the improvement of the legislative framework in relation to the minorities so as to provide better protection for minorities’ rights, especially with regard to social protection and development issues.

Bringing people together

The country strategy, developed in 2000, follows the general direction of this programme to reach out to community level and to provide developmental assistance to local groups. *The strategy was designed to be flexible and adjustable* from year to year so that it would serve as an effective tool, capable of responding to day-to-day developments and needs in the country.

The main objective of the programme is to encourage co-operation, tolerance and participation between different ethnic groups in Albania. It searches for stimulating and innovative practices that improve inter-ethnic relations and encourage equal participation of all groups of the population in the development process.

The approach consists of providing support to local initiatives, not only as grants but also through individual advice and assistance. Activating the grassroots level is a key aspect of the programme as still there are few community-based organisations in Albania at this time. The strategy has identified five priority areas for support of local initiatives: civil society development, education, media, the arts and culture. *Priority is given to project initiatives that directly address the ethnic needs of communities, which include joint activities of at least two different communities and which demonstrate clear opportunities to impact positively on the mentality and behaviour of these communities.*

Another aspect of the programme strategy is to create a forum for dialogue between all of the organisations which are working to bring about positive change in inter-ethnic co-operation at national and district levels and building the capacities of local communities in advocacy with local and central governments.

The *target groups* of the programme are ethnic minorities such as the Roma, Greeks, Macedonians, Vlachs and Montenegrins. Priority is given to children and young people, especially in the case of Romani minorities. The programme is targeted at those districts where there is a presence of ethnic minorities, although strict limitations are not imposed because of the high mobility of the population over the last decade.

The first step in the Albanian programme was to identify the best way to reach out to the various localities. An information leaflet was distributed to all areas where ethnic groups were present, as well as to other important stakeholders of the programme. In addition, an electronic newsletter was prepared to communicate information about the new 2001-2002 programme and this was distributed to NGOs, individuals and institutions whose activities were directly or indirectly involved with ethnic issues.

The HDPC also invested time and effort in *direct* communication. It organised seven regional round tables in Elbasan, Korça, Saranda, Shkodra, Vlora, Durrresi, Tirana. More than 150 participants, representing 65 NGOs, local authorities, and Regional Education Directorates and other representatives, attended the discussions. In many instances, the moderators of the round table discussions were drawn from local government representatives, or were individuals with outstanding personal experience. Local media were also invited to participate, to discuss and contribute to raising community awareness about the programme. A further ten meetings were organised with NGOs from cities that had not been covered during the round table discussions. Throughout the proactive information campaign, HDPC experts provided individual assistance to some 28 grassroots organisations, providing special input to project formulation issues.

All of those who participated in the round table discussions considered them to be both necessary and important. Representatives from local government, NGOs and other interested individuals were informed about the programme strategy and implementation, questions were raised and importantly, new relationships were established between participants. In fact, these meetings turned into district

discussion forums on issues of civil society, human rights and development. HDPC has strongly encouraged collaboration between local grassroots NGOs and, for the first time, joint projects were presented based on cooperation between organisations. This is an extremely encouraging sign for continued development of networking in future implementation of the programme.

As a result of the information campaign, 52 project proposals were submitted by local NGOs to the SOROS Foundation, 16 of which 16 projects were approved for financing by an ad hoc board. 12 of the 16 selected projects were presented by grassroots' local organisations and four by organisations based in Tirana.

Promoting grassroots organisations

The core of the implementation strategy of the programme is the direct involvement of grassroots organisations that are close to the communities as well as, wherever possible, partnership with local institutions. Capacity building is an important process that has been integrated in the programme.

The projects were implemented in 10 geographic areas, in line with the priority areas identified in the country strategy.

As additional support for the organisations selected, a special training programme was designed, based on direct discussions with the supported NGOs about their needs. Eight training seminars covering various topics were organised and 95 representatives from the 16 financed NGOs participated.

HDPC also organised five regional meetings, held respectively in Saranda, Gjirokastra, Elbasani, Permeti and Tirana, with the participation of staff responsible for implementing the projects, representatives from local government, university professors and beneficiaries, in order to exchange experiences about the activities which had been implemented and to discuss ways of improving and coordinating implementation of the projects among the NGOs involved. Monitoring visits during the project activities frequently involved individual assistance to the local organisations, which in turn helped increase local potential. Such meetings often provided fascinating opportunities not just to look at the "other community" through different eyes, but also to observe oneself from the "other's" perspective.

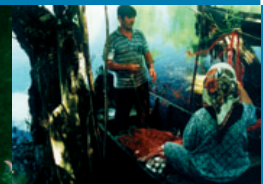
“Looking at yourself through the eyes of others”

During the round table discussion of a project implemented in Elbasan city, an unusual conversation took place between a lecturer, a psychologist from Elbasani University, and the Romani and Egyptian women participants in the project. The lecturer was addressing the invited minority women on the issue of parent-children relationships, but she blundered on a key area. She herself failed to maintain a dialogue of equality and partnership during her talk when, at a certain point, she began to criticise the women, as mothers, for forcing their children to beg on the streets, which had a very negative impact to the children’s education and development. It is a fact that in Albania, all of the beggars are either Roma or Egyptians.

The Romani and Egyptian women listened attentively, without joining in the discussion, but when the lecturer went further and made accusations, one of the Egyptian women stood up and said to the lecturer:

“It is true that we force our children to get out onto the street to beg, but we behave this way because we have no money to eat or to buy food while you, the whites, have more money to live but you allow your daughters to prostitute themselves on the streets of Albania and other countries. No girls from our community do that job! Why do you never speak about your own problems in such round tables and talk only about our problems? We all have problems and if we don’t discuss them openly between us, we will never solve them.” The lecturer was suddenly completely at a loss and only the intervention of the project leader brought the situation back to normality.

We have to admit that this entire project could have failed in just a moment, if the participants had been unable to establish reciprocal equality. It is crucial in all of our work to accept that each ethnic minority has its virtues, just as it has its own evils.



Increasing community participation

Looking back over the first year of implementation, the Albanian country strategy proved to be appropriate and responded to the community's needs. Flexibility in approaching a variety of local issues, success in reaching out to local level, as well as the creative process of learning together with the communities and facilitating the growth of their capacities and networking between them are all promising indications of the success of the programme.

Whilst helping local initiatives to develop, it became increasingly obvious that our programme tackled different mentalities, cultures and traditions, often influenced by different political intentions and, time after time, by other local, national and regional developments. The complexity and dynamic nature of the programme proved time and again that flexibility was the correct choice. It became increasingly evident that a single programme could not achieve sustainable results whether it lasted days or even a year. Change of the sort we are hoping for can take decades and generations and requires common agendas and policies among the institutions dealing with those generations. Nevertheless, the programme's contribution is significant and continues to be testified. We are also convinced that early warning interventions are of real importance in the different areas. The more groups we coach, the more issues we can identify and prioritise for further intervention.

During last year's programme in the areas inhabited by the Greek minority, cases of misunderstanding with the Albanian community were identified. Different reasons were responsible for provoking such situations, but in most cases there was a mix of political, economic and religious factors, requiring quick and sensitive intervention.

Community participation during the phase of project preparation was somewhat limited. In fact, we noticed that even grassroots organisations lack the knowledge of mechanisms to build up relationships and cooperation within the community and the know-how to gain their trust and confidence. Considering the importance of this aspect of the programme HDPC intends to be more present during the programme implementation in order to further develop the tools for true cooperation of organisations with the community. NGOs almost always try to engage *community participation* in their activities because they recognise its importance in generating success. It is however,

a two-sided issue that also involves the community's willingness to participate and to contribute. Unfortunately, the organisations sometimes lack knowledge about appropriate tools and techniques of communication with the community that could help kindle their interest to participate and contribute.

More involvement of local authorities

Cooperation between local organisations, community members and local authorities has been the focus of our programme. It has proved that ensuring community participation as well as the participation of the local authorities both before and during the project implementation is a difficult task, requiring a great deal of effort, but one which is heartily worthwhile. Such an approach provides knowledge, experience and, importantly, allows practices to be expanded beyond those target groups initially envisaged.

Links between organisations and local authorities seem, in most cases, to be rather formal and create little real impact on the evolution of the projects. It is a positive fact that organisations are in favour of more partnership but, once again, the partnership can only function when both parties so wish it. To make this happen, the organisations suggested that local government could also be assisted on issues such as the participatory approach in decision-making, public accountability and transparency, tools for communication with citizens and so forth.

The importance of media

The *use of media* is limited and there are weak links between the NGOs and the media. All of them feel the need to have stronger links with the media, to understand how to use and involve the media in their activities, and to ensure that both sides understand the potential benefit to the community of such cooperation. In the short term, we think that it is important to increase the number of projects in the media field as well as introducing more media activities at national level. The use of high-level professionals from media has been another important lesson learned. Issues related to minorities are extremely sensitive and when the media are involved, professional treatment of such issues is essential.

The programme has also shown that the NGOs with whom we work welcome the participation of local authorities in the activities, as well as that of the community, but that all of the players usually lack the appropriate tools and techniques to communicate between each other. The communication gaps between civil society organisations, community members and local authorities will need to be addressed with care throughout the duration of the programme.

Flexible implementation approach

During last year's programme, there were difficulties in implementing some of the projects in the way that had been foreseen. These projects involved improvement in communications between the Greek minority and national Albanians. In such instances, we feel it is important to allow a certain degree of flexibility to the organisations so as to enable them to adjust their planned activities.

After regional meetings to evaluate the programme as a learning process, the KBF partners from other countries and members of the HDPC team held a number of in-depth discussions on how to make this process more vital, communicative, participative and inclusive. In fact, all of the organisations involved currently follow practically the same reporting format for the implemented activities, in which the narrative reports serve principally to justify the financial reports submitted to the donor. It was decided to focus more attention on case stories and events which would illustrate, in a much more natural and human way, the situation prior to the initiative, the environment, the dynamics and the progress achieved during the implementation of the programme. We believed that such an approach would significantly increase the value of the programme itself and would contribute to providing a new vision and a new tradition for organisations and donors.

Inter-community and intra-community involvement

The Albanian programme has been dealing not just with improving relations between different communities, but also with approaching issues of internal community relations that can (and usually do) have a negative effect on integration opportunities within the community. In this respect the experience from Elbasan, a city in the centre of Albania, is worth mentioning.

Elbasan has both Romani and Egyptian minorities. Two projects are being implemented here: *"The integration of Romani and Egyptian women with the rest of Elbasan society"* and *"Let's talk to each other"*. The first project began with unforeseen difficulties: the Romani women did not want to socialise with the Egyptian women. Despite this, through exploiting common personal acquaintances, we were able to organise some round tables with Albanian, Romani and Egyptian women. Their acknowledgement of their respective problems created extraordinary interest in the neighbourhoods where these women lived. Romani women do not recognise divorce and they end their education when they are 10 or 11 years old. The reason for this is that the Roma do not want to send their daughters to schools that are also attended by boys.

The project staff decided to talk with Romani businessmen, the husbands of these women. After the meeting, during which the negatives of illiteracy were discussed, the businessmen decided to sponsor the building of a school for girls only in their borough, effectively taking a great step towards emancipation through one single gesture. The Romani community does not have any obvious problems of racism with the Albanian community. Indeed their integration in Albanian society is seen in fields such as the arts, sport and business. They do, however, have problems *within their community*, where the chief of the tribe plays an important role. His word means law.

A number of very good projects have been implemented with Romani and Evgjiits minorities in areas such as Elbasani, Permeti and Tirana, but the Roma and the Evgjiits sometimes share ambivalent feelings about integration. They often prefer to opt for some minor improvement in status, rather than some more fundamental change because they are concerned that complete integration might result in assimilation and a loss of important aspects of their culture. This argument is, however, sometimes used as an excuse to justify segregation, making it difficult to determine in some communities the extent to which segregation is the result of outside discrimination and how far it is a self-imposed effort to preserve their culture. Such segregation is common in the case of Roma in Korça, Elbasani and Shkodra, where intervention of the programme is needed to promote integration.





Bulgaria

The IEI Foundation in the mirror

The inter ethnic initiative for human rights foundation emerged from a citizens' pressure group called the committee for the defence of minority rights. It promotes the philosophy that successful inter-ethnic cooperation and full participation of minorities in public life are only possible where both sides in the process have equal rights and are equally respected. All of the programmes initiated by IEI over the years have worked on the one hand to raise levels of self-confidence and emancipate minority communities that are under-represented in public life and, on the other hand, to simultaneously help build bridges between them and those around them.



The team's approach has always been based on creativity, learning and flexibility to respond to real needs. We have undertaken social surveys and research on hot issues. We have monitored the state's adherence to minority rights and we have trained citizens' organisations, volunteer groups and people from institutions in human/minority rights, emphasising how they can use their knowledge to advocate for the rights of vulnerable groups in relevant institutions. In ethnically mixed regions, we have initiated regional social programmes to emancipate marginalised (usually minority) communities and bring them together with the rest of the population in the everyday life of their locality.

In parallel with this, we worked on breaking up the Bulgarocentric arrogance of the education system by means of curriculum development. We created richly illustrated intercultural education materials for mainstream schools and trained teachers how to use them.

To bring all of this to the eyes and ears of the public and institutions, we not only hold regular conferences on inter-ethnic relations and human rights, we also publish a two-monthly magazine, *Ethno Reporter* and broadcast a weekly one-hour intercultural radio programme called *Studio Ethno*.

Bulgaria

How to discriminate against discrimination: a practical programme for inter-ethnic solidarity

Let us forget about reports, evaluations and the other ritual forms of communication to which we sometimes resort. Our story will not be about the usual subjects of reports - target groups, beneficiaries, and facilitators. Instead it will take you, as closely as possible, to the very roots of events, to their real-life environment and to their everyday existence. We should like to introduce you to the people who are bringing about change and to the many dimensions of this change. Our story is about... well, let us begin.

Ethnic tolerance or just conformity? The challenge

Bulgaria has never been known for having a coherent and rational policy towards its minorities, but the enforced assimilation campaign undertaken by the Communist authorities in the 1980's against Bulgarian Turks was the crowning glory of its incoherence and irrationality. That is why the beginning of the transition period found a society divided by existential arguments about whether Bulgarians should "give in" to the Turks and "give them back" their Turkish names and whether they should "give" them the chance to speak their own mother tongue again ("with all the risks which that carries"). There were demonstrations and protests and people were set against one against the other. Thankfully, at least nobody actually took up arms. So after the wave of anger had passed, civil life gradually oiled the mechanism of coexistence between Bulgarians and Turks, which creaked back to life despite the bitterness that remained after years of repression.

Over the years, this fact inspired the public and the political class so much that the chorus "Bulgarian ethnic model" was publicly conceived, born and written up in large red letters in the annals of political history. Its obvious function is to suggest true ethnic tolerance. Well, it is true that there has been no armed conflict in Bulgaria, but does that mean we have true ethnic tolerance? If so, why is there a wall of consensus to turn a blind eye to the horrifying Romani

ghettoes, to the monstrous isolation of whole generations of Roma, to the complete abdication on the part of the state of its responsibilities to a large section of its population?

However much we congratulate ourselves about our own tolerance, there is a long way to go. National legislation has not yet been brought into line with international human/minority rights standards. Most institutional employees know neither the standards of human and minority rights nor the international human rights agreements ratified by Bulgaria. Many do not even know the Constitution and the laws of the land.

No wonder then that not one decision maker at any level of government is able to see the links between development processes and adherence to human/minority rights, or the links between continuous human rights violations and entrenched poverty. No wonder there is no human rights/minority rights based approach to development issues and in government decision-making. How can one apply the right therapy without the right diagnosis?

What about civil society and its functions of order? We should not be nihilistic and ignore one of the best results of the transition years – the emergence of civil society organisations. Many of them were set up by people from marginalised minority communities as their only chance to have their voice heard. At least, that was the theory. A lot of NGOs are weak, but many do as much good, difficult and useful work as their counterparts in established democracies, despite working in incomparably more difficult conditions. The majority of the most essential and unpopular legislative, institutional and public transformations have come about precisely because of pressure from these NGOs.

If we are not nihilistic, neither must we be boastful. Otherwise we shall fail to see the obvious: that citizens' organisations are often sluggish because each works alone. They fail to take an interest in what is happening on the other side of the fence from their own projects, making them less effective socially. In the field of inter-ethnic relations such tunnel vision succeeds only in ghettoising local problems along ethnic lines – “our” problems and “their” problems. It merely consolidates the view that minorities and the majority should each deal

separately with their own problems. Unfortunately, harmonising ethnic relations does not happen like that. Such an approach succeeds only in maintaining the status quo in relations between the majority and the minorities, achieving at best some kind of passive ethnic coexistence, but in the absence of any real inter-ethnic cooperation and feeling for one's fellows.

Putting together a solution

Since the beginning of the 1990's, the members of the IEI Foundation team have worked to protect minority rights and promote a link between them and the processes of development. This led naturally to the creation of the *Inter Ethnic Development Fund* as a special programme, designed to make the connection in practice.

We designed the fund to encourage broad, national competitive calls for proposals with precise criteria for awarding grants, prioritising inter-ethnic cooperation, seeking out the best of local ideas to break the inter-ethnic ice in their communities. We also introduced means by which all participants, ourselves included, could grow and learn through interesting and informed communication and through sharing our visions for problems. In designing the Fund, we set out to form a network of equally competent partners, working not only on their local problems, but showing solidarity with others further away and campaigning on their behalf.

We raised funds for this idea from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation in the USA, the King Baudouin Foundation in Belgium and the Open Society Foundation in Bulgaria. For us, these foundations are much more than donors. They are partners because, at the time our paths crossed, they had been working on their own programme called *Improving Ethnic Relations in Southeast Europe*, and it was into this programme that our own idea was incorporated, with the Inter Ethnic Initiative for Human Rights (IEI) Foundation as national coordinator.

Now we come to the heart of our story. In forty places with ethnically mixed populations, life has started to move, thanks to seventy-five citizens' organisations working together in forty joint initiatives, creating different

versions of the best form of ethnic coexistence. The dozens of people in these local teams have no patience with the conservatism around them, with its prejudices and intolerance to ethnically and religiously different people and with its instinct to isolate the most vulnerable minority communities in a social corner. These people channel their creativity into making changes, their perseverance into overcoming local taboos, to finding like-minded people, knowledge and ability, watching out for the tyranny of the strong against the weak and extending their solidarity further than the end of their own noses.

What proof do we have of the effects? What makes people come out of their shells, take part in change and change themselves? We should love to tell you all forty stories, but here are just a few of them, to give you some idea of what is happening.

No more cultural self-censorship

What is the key to taking a genuine part in what goes on in society? Firstly you must have an authentic presence in society. If those around you respect you for what you are and how you identify, it makes your life normal. If not, you cannot lead a normal life.

In the Rhodope Mountains, as in the rest of Bulgaria, the wounds from the forced assimilation of Muslims in the past have still not healed. In some villages, especially the smaller ones, the question of Muslim identity is still painful to all sides. Muslims still censor themselves so as not to open up old wounds. For some of the Christian population, the memory of past events arouses latent feelings of guilt, or sometimes just a tendency to minimise their importance, because of their own or their relatives' involvement in the assimilation process. Sometimes change begins when you say who you are.

Coming out of our ethnic closet

“When I heard that my colleagues and I were going to some project seminar, I thought we’d be wasting three days, just when we could be harvesting the potatoes. But it gave us a lot. The lecturer first got us to answer the question “Who am I?” Where we live, that’s an awkward question. Christian or Muslim, we’re not used to talking about that in public. All of us Muslims keep quiet about how we identify ourselves. I suppose you could call it cultural self-censorship...

There, however, for the first time we could say that we’re Muslims without worrying about it. For the first time, we pulled the cork out of our blocked identity. Later in the project, in an environment where everyone took note of and respected cultural differences, a lot more things began to happen. Romani children became part of the scene. At school, Christians and Muslims began to act out not only Christmas rituals, but also both the Muslim and Christian versions of Hederlezi, which we celebrate on St. George’s Day.

For the first time, Christian children went into a mosque and Muslim children into a church. In the newspapers, they published the children’s drawings, which were full of cross-cultural symbols. And the teachers from my school, who up until recently were too shy to show their minority identity in any way at all, joined up with the Christian teachers in preparing and writing lessons for intercultural education and upbringing. So all of us have grown up out of ourselves and we want to write and publish a teaching aid for teachers in other schools who, like us, want to interpret their culture and their differences in a new way.”

Subka Mitova

Individual Diversity And Identity project, Smilyan, Southern Bulgaria

A way out of apathy

The disappearance of people’s motivation and courage to participate, especially among members of marginalised communities, is one of the most disastrous results of misguided state policies which excluded genuine participation and replaced it with politically orchestrated initiatives. Motivation to participate is of course important, but no less important is who is inclined to participate and in what? Are people from the minority or majority ready to get involved only



in the problems of their own group, or can they look beyond and find common solutions to common problems?

All of the initiatives we support were conceived and implemented by *inter-ethnic* teams. They started with a lot of enthusiasm and a lot of difficulties in an environment where nobody knew what the standards are, either in human rights or in development. How then were they to eliminate elements of assimilation at a conceptual level? Where could they find good examples? How to recruit and train team members to work well together? How to nurture trust within the local community in order to support the process?

After months of hard work, some mixed teams of members of NGOs, experts, local politicians and administrators clarified their vision of how marginalised minority communities could take part fully in local development processes. In several locations the newly born strategies and practical programmes were submitted for approval to municipal councils and even became official framework municipal policy documents for local minority communities. So what is there to show at the end? Some municipalities, like Haskovo,

Madzharovo and Stambolovo in Southeast Bulgaria, adopted programmes to address employment problems of people from minorities or health care problems whilst still, of course, preserving cultural identity. In Pazardzhik, in Central Bulgaria, a *Strategy for Romany Integration through Education* was put into effect. In Vidin, as the result of an IEDF project, a Council on Ethnic Issues and Minority Integration was set up to and acquired the status of a permanent commission in the municipal council.

Muslim and Christian women from Banite, in the central Rhodope Mountains of Southern Bulgaria, helped to develop an alternative programme of tourism as a way out of the grinding poverty suffered by the town's few thousand inhabitants. These women did not give the municipal council a moment's rest. Alternative tourism has now been given top priority in the municipal strategy.

Of course, there is still a long way to go before all of the strategies and programmes created by these enthusiastic people come to full fruition, but one thing is sure: when people have the opportunity to think up their own ideas to improve their everyday life, they feel as if they own them and so they care for them. Any clever person in authority should recognise what a boon this is!

And last, but not least, it was rewarding to hear what the Deputy Mayor of Vidin said, off the record: "It's good to feel that we're coming up to the standards of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. It was like double Dutch to us before, but now we can understand what it means and work with it."

Which is quite a step forward for institutions where so few people have any idea how to apply human/minority rights legislation in practice.

A slap in the face of prejudice

Big ethnic conflicts come and go. They are stubborn and sometimes chronic because, apart from the highly charged emotions about who's got the "best blood", these conflicts involve a mass of macro-interests. As for small ethnic conflicts, they happen all the time. In small villages, in big towns and in a

myriad of microcosms, each conflict is fuelled by the same crazy idea: the superiority of our own blood (or group or race) and the inferiority of others.

All of the Inter Ethnic Development Fund project initiatives attack this spiritual, psychological and intellectual disease in one way or another. They bring families from different ethnic groups and religions together around joint initiatives (often centred around children). Or ethnic groups are brought together in a professional community, such as teachers, or in one and the same classroom, in one school, or on one building site or one football field.

The most popular field of IEDF funded activities has turned out to be that which encourages intercultural dialogue in schools. Funding applications for such projects just poured in, and it is for these that most of the grants have been awarded. What do all of the intercultural applicants have in common? They behave like Canadians or Norwegians, full of cultural curiosity and tolerance. Their initiatives strive to make school lessons more interesting, to enrich them with more diverse contents. They develop curricular material to familiarise pupils with other cultures, to participate in the celebrations of different ethnic groups and to visit their special sites. Take a look at the pupils' essays and drawings and you will see what they have been up to in class. Or take a look at the following story:

When tolerance means generosity

"I don't suppose what we're doing on this project is anything new in the world. But then, what hasn't been done before in the world? What's important is that for us here, it's completely new. With the special interest clubs we set up in this *Friend* project, for the first time ever, children had the chance to give performances based on their ethnic and religious uniqueness. And they learned about the things Christianity and Islam had in common and about the values of others. Their eyes gradually opened to the diversity in our multi-ethnic village and they began to respect it. I'm convinced that they're prepared to be tolerant because in everything we've done, we have helped the children to feel happy by just being themselves, not to feel their culture is threatened or laughed at, and that they're equals. We saw that if people are encouraged to be themselves, they're more inclined to be open and generous to the identity of those around them."

Mariana Dimitrova, Teacher
Friend project, Slivo Pole, Northeast Bulgaria

No wonder, then, that even over the course of only one school year, there are clear signals from a number of the local initiatives that ethnic prejudices are beginning to be overcome. Who said it could not be done! Actually, we know who says this. Such voices come from schools burdened with persistent Bulgarian ethnocentricity, from schools that tell us so often that children aren't interested in Bulgarian culture, let alone some gypsy or Turkish "cultures"!

The media projects funded by the IEDF are another source of categorical intolerance to ethnic prejudice. Our partner team from the *Media with a Human Face* association challenges stereotypes by broadcasting 20-minute documentaries on *Plovdiv Public TV*. Romeos and Juliets from different ethnic groups are shown overcoming the prejudices in their environment, proving once again that love is a stronger feeling than hatred.

Media with a Human Face also broadcasts regular, one-hour long live discussions on burning inter-ethnic issues. People from various ethnic and religious groups take part in these, as well as people from abroad who have established families in Bulgaria.

The voice, the eyes and the soul of the ghetto come across to the public in another programme in Plovdiv, whose focus is on Stolipinovo, the biggest ghetto in the Balkans and the crossroads of countless social, political, economic and moral problems. The programme is produced by an ethnically mixed team from the neighbourhood and broadcast by the regional section of Bulgarian National Radio. When it started, listeners were hesitant, but the radio people quickly realised that it is a strong programme because it is real, and it is real because the people who make it are inextricably intertwined with the destiny of this controversial neighbourhood.

The journalist teams in the IEDF network produce remarkable radio and TV programmes on national and regional media. Sparks often fly on their phone-in lines. Aggressive voices sometimes abuse people from the "wrong" ethnic group and with the "wrong" religion. There are fierce verbal duels between opposing groups of opinions. Overall, however, direct feedback (phone-ins) and our partners' listener and viewer surveys provide us with a glimmer of hope that audiences are beginning to distance themselves from extreme views on minorities. We hope that we have made a modest contribution to the birth of such a crucial change.

Making new tracks

Today, we are on the eve of a new round of proposals for local initiatives for projects in the Inter Ethnic Development Fund. Where do we go from here?

We can sense that we are on the right track in a great many ways.

Nevertheless, there remain some desperately poor communities, completely cut off from normal life and faced with real hostility (especially the Roma). Being so excluded as to be almost locked away, how will these people read and interpret our high-sounding words about *participation*? How can they compete in the Inter Ethnic Fund, which only gives grants to inter-ethnic initiatives, when they have no one to be inter-ethnic *with*? Does this mean that we have to agree to go ahead without them, as if their priorities, ideas and contribution were of no importance?

The answer is clear: we must set to work with a selected marginalised minority community and then with the other groups, institutions, media and everything else around it. We must work to bring all of the fragmented parts of the local whole closer together until they reach the level from which the projects of the IED Fund usually start. That is, a readiness declared by the different ethnic groups to work together to find solutions to local priority problems.

Although we need to move into this new territory, we must also ensure that what has already been undertaken is not stillborn. We have to check that the achievements of local teams are taken further, development strategies are translated into programmes, programmes are turned into action, money provided for that action, that someone is making the effort to find money for it, and we have to check who is making the effort and whether people are learning from the lessons of citizen participation. These are just the sorts of searching questions that many authorities try to avoid.

Our initiatives, like everything done in the name of improving ethnic relations, need a direct path to the eyes, ears, hearts and minds of society at large. The question of well-informed and exciting media coverage is crucial. Apart from criticising the media for what they fail to do, journalists should be rewarded for what they do well. So we are planning a robust and prestigious national competition for tolerant and exciting journalism on ethnic issues.



Macedonia

The implementing partner



The *Foundation Open Society Institute of Macedonia*

(*FOSIM*) was founded in 1992 and is a part of the Soros Foundation Network in more than 40 countries around the world. Over the last ten years, the Institute has played the role of catalyst for civil society in Macedonia, combining support with pro-active programmes, to create and strengthen citizen groups and organisations able to address key development issues.

Human rights, diversity, integration of minorities and improvement of inter-ethnic relations have been a long-term crosscutting priority for the Institute. They have been at the heart and soul of the organisation in many of its programmes, whose approach is based on the belief that equal participation of minorities and respect for otherness are at the core of civil society practices. Another long-term priority of the organisation is to activate the community level through helping to create new types of self-organisation that are willing and capable to address local problems.

FOSIM has been the partner of the King Baudouin Foundation in searching for alternatives and creative answers to the many challenges in the area of inter-ethnic relations. It has been one of the long-term partners helping to create a new strategy to reach out more deeply into the community at local level.

Over the last year the Institute has done much to help the country rediscover the pulse of civil society amid a situation of overall crises, organising campaigns, discussions, initiatives involving numerous civic organisations and institutions. We could tell you numerous stories about the challenges of being strategic and generating optimism in times of crises and painful conflicts.

The re-design of the “Improving Inter-ethnic Relations” programme can serve as a good case study of the participatory approach and of flexibility in strategy development in a very rapidly changing environment. The new approach was born as a result of numerous consultations and discussions, involving organisations of all ethnic groups, working nationally or at community level. It has been facilitated by a passionate and committed team comprising members of FOSIM and a network of advisors and facilitators working in various districts around the country.



Macedonia

Living in Parallel Worlds

“(...) Let the countries of Southeast Europe do what the Western World was unable to do. That way they will be able to become part of Europe, not as paupers into a rich man’s world, but as countries with precious treasures to bring: moral richness, stability, peace, and development. The peoples of Southeast Europe should remember that nationalism is not patriotism, and that it does not constitute an ancient virtue. On the contrary, nationalism is a contemporary evil: the poisoned form of self-admiration as opposed to the “other”, whoever he/she might be, which occurred during the last century and has set firm as a devastating political force in Europe at the turn of our century.

Europe got rid of nationalism with the Second World War. Now, the peoples of Southeast Europe must put an end to this great evil. (...)”

Nulo Minisi, *Foundation Mediterranean Laboratory: From the Appeal to the Peoples of South-eastern Europe, 1999*

What was the outcome of the several-month conflict that started in February 2001, as a result of the escalation of aggravated inter-ethnic relations (primarily between Macedonians and Albanians) in Macedonia? Not an easy question, but some elements of the answer are certain: a hundred of dead civilians and soldiers, many orphans, grieving families and demolished houses. More than 100,000 people were expelled from their ancient homes (smartly labelled “internally displaced people”). The infrastructure was destroyed, the economy damaged, impoverishment, and unemployment created. A state was left with a sullied image and its citizens living, now more than ever, in parallel worlds.

Recent history written in blood

After the collapse of the SFR Yugoslavia, inter-ethnic relations and the position of minorities in Macedonia seemed to improve. The heritage of the former federation (and especially the momentum of Albanian minority marginalisation) was too heavy to overcome overnight. In 1992, only 2% of the Albanian minority was represented in the country’s national administration. By 2001 this

had increased to 10%, but this proportion was still far below the share of the Albanian minority in the country's population.

However, despite the improvement in representation, communication between people in everyday life remained limited. Macedonians, Albanians, Roma, Turks, Vlachs, and Serbs lived in isolated, parallel worlds, not knowing each other sufficiently and without understanding each other's customs, traditions, cultures, languages and religions. Nationalistic projects "launched" in the Balkans in the 1990's (Serbian, Croatian, Albanian) further impeded inter-ethnic tolerance. Even when (and where) relations between different groups existed (Albanian-Turks, Macedonians-Serbs-Vlachs and, to a lesser extent, Macedonians-Turks or Macedonians-Albanians), these were quite minimal and, as ethnic conflicts became aggravated, they grew rare.

Such ghettoed communities, based on ethnicity and religion, became even more polarized after the first sparks of the war of last February in the village of Tanusevci and, a month later, in the village Tearce, in the Tetovo region. The conflict spilled over into the regions of Skopje, Tetovo, and Kumanovo (in northwest Macedonia), bringing many victims, much new suffering and devastation and, above all, "writing" the new history in blood. By August 2001, when relative peace had been established following the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, the feuds and the "bloody memories" on both sides were sufficient for pessimistic forecasts to be made about the feasibility of different ethnicities living together again.

Although the Ohrid Agreement should ensure improved minority representation at institutional level, it will not be able to erase the suffering, intolerance, hatred, fear and distrust engendered by the warfare. There is, nevertheless one issue on which most analysts of the Macedonian Crisis agree, namely that prior to 2001, whilst minority rights were certainly violated (although the extent to which this happened varies according to different analysts), they were not violated to an extent that necessitated armed conflict. The problem could and should have been resolved through dialogue. Must we now face, as a crushing fact, that there will be no dialogue between the polarized ethnicities of Macedonia?

“In 1995 I was discussing Tetovo University with my friend S., a young Albanian woman and leader of the Albanian Youth Organisation. We had never talked about education before, for fear of hurting each other with our different opinions. After about two hours, I realized that, because of such fears, I had been unable to understand the Albanians’ need to have education in their native language. My friend explained that need and I realized how my initial opinion had been based on the assumption that I could not have Albanian friends if we did not speak the same language. Slowly the picture became clear. We live together, but we do not know each other, since we have no means of communicating with each other. That was how our project *Let’s Get to Know Each Other* started.”

Azbija Memedova, Roma Centre – Skopje

Now, almost a year after the cease-fire and the signing of the Ohrid Agreement, Macedonia still faces sporadic shooting, the presence of extreme military factions, reinforced nationalism and inter-ethnic relations more difficult than ever. Greater minority rights have been brought about through the Agreement as well as through changes implemented in administration and legislation, but everyday life has not changed much. In some aspects it has become even worse, especially with regard to the economic situation. Poverty and the economic crisis were reinforced by the conflict and fuelled new types of nationalism, increasing the ethnic divide and strengthening militant inclinations, especially among young people. Unemployment has made it difficult for people to create and provide for their own families and as a result, many young people have joined mercenary – regular or irregular – military organisations. War is a lucrative business and there will always be someone willing to make money out of it.

These are just a few of the important challenges now facing Macedonia. Stabilising the economy cannot be separated from conciliation among the people. This will require major efforts and a great deal of time. It will be a real challenge for both the Government and civil society, including non-governmental organisations.

The less-televised minorities

Coverage and analyses of the Macedonian Crisis focused (and still focus) on the situation of the Albanian minority. There have, however, been rather few discussions or considerations about the position of the other minorities in Macedonia. The position of the Roma, who live on the edge of abject poverty, extreme unemployment, and limited access to education, health care and public welfare, is particularly difficult. Even worse, the major ethnic groups often perceive the Roma to be “alien” (i.e. “legitimately excluded”).

From a certain point of view, the social situation and poverty are not just consequences of marginalisation; they in turn become a cause of its aggravation. Social exclusion and poverty, with all their implications, are in fact probably contributing much more than the political environment to polarising the different ethnicities in Macedonia.

Education and information about “the other” are key words here. Education and information should be the primary tools used to bring together different and distinct groups, not through seminars and trainings but rather through common practices. It is common practices between different groups that make the difference and it is in this direction that the programme for the improvement of inter-ethnic relations, as a partnership between the King Baudouin Foundation and the Foundation Open Society Institute – Macedonia (FOSIM), has been developing over the last few years. Projects were implemented that helped communities to promote the understanding of different cultures and traditions, improve communication between groups, recognise mutual differences and learn how to respect those differences.

Probably the most characteristic example of this approach was ALMATUROBO – a group which, as an initiative of the Roma Centre in the City of Skopje, brought together numerous young people – Macedonians, Albanians, Roma, Turks, Bosniaks, and others, who got to know each other, shared opinions, fell in love, became friends.

“The magic of ALMATUROBO”

From 1998 to 1999 the Roma Centre in the City of Skopje implemented the *Let's Get to Know Each Other* project, in which various ethnic groups, all equally represented, participated in a series of workshops. These were aimed at opening a dialogue and enabling participants to get to know each other better, with all their differences, though the ethnic component was to be minimised. That project subsequently developed into ALMATUROBO (the title is an acronym, made up from the names of the different ethnicities: Albanians, Macedonians, Turks, Romas, Bosniaks). This group of young people attempted to disseminate positive energy and the idea that we can live with each other, get acquainted and intertwine. The magic words of ALMATUROBO were simply: *Respect!* and *Communicate!*. Unfortunately (there is always a “but”), the younger members of the group were not prepared to talk about the “hottest” issues outside of the group meetings in their respective communities. Perhaps they were afraid; perhaps they simply did not know how to do it.

“In my opinion, there is a lack of willingness among young people to become the carriers of positive changes in the country” – says Azbija Memedova, the initiator of ALMATUROBO. “They feared extending their discussions beyond the group, thinking that they might become alienated and lose their friends and colleagues.”



Many activities have been undertaken to help people to destroy the walls that divide them. Progress has been very difficult, since it has to overcome numerous deep-rooted prejudices and fears, as well as insufficient knowledge in certain situations. Numerous activities with this same goal of breaking down walls have been initiated both by the Improving Inter-ethnic Relations Programme and by FOSIM, before, during, and after the Macedonian Crisis. The *Appeal for Peace*, the *Appeal Against Insanity* and *It's Enough*, were all supported by hundreds of members from all of the ethnicities that live in Macedonia. Furthermore, the projects implemented with the support of the King Baudouin Foundation stressed the spirit of coexistence and the desire of the different ethnic groups to live together, however small their number in relation to the total population.

One of the projects supported by the King Baudouin Foundation, though not at first sight “multiethnic”, illustrates extremely well the intertwined nature of cultures and traditions that have existed for centuries within the territory of Macedonia. This project was initiated by an NGO, comprising mainly Macedonians, called ERINA (The Journalists’ Legal Environmental Centre). The Centre called for cooperation with a number of mainly Albanian associations and as a result a multiethnic “coalition” was established including El Hilal, the Islamic Confession Group, and the Ministry of the Environment.

Symbolically, the project was implemented around a tree, a five centuries-old cedar located in the yard of the Ghazi Isa Bey Mosque in Skopje. For ERINA and El Hilal the tree was a symbol of coexistence, a symbol of Slavonic spirit that had lived in the yard of a member of the Muslim faith, a witness of the centuries. The tree was to be the benchmark for messages. There was a certain danger that, because of its great age and because it was attacked by fungi and insects, the tree might break and fall and that the centuries-old coexistence that had existed in Macedonia might disintegrate in much the same manner. Action was undertaken to heal the tree and ensure its continued long life. On completion of the tree’s expert rehabilitation, ERINA and El Hilal organised a ceremony under its colossal branches, to present the idea of the project, accompanied by readings of Macedonian, Albanian, and Turkish poetry, translated into all three languages. The audience for the ceremony was massive, sending a message about the people’s desire to live together and get to know each other’s cultural and creative talents.

Perhaps the answer to the question “How can we get closer to each other?” is to be found in the manner promoted in most of the projects supported by the

Improving Inter-ethnic Relations Programme, in the informal way of involving people in joint, non-political activities such as culture, music, urban issues and environmental protection. The easiest way for people to overcome prejudices is not by discussing them, but through the promotion of positive values – the arts, traditions, friendly relations and how to continue improving the conditions for coexistence.

Coexistence through common practices

The strategy of coexistence between the various ethnicities in Macedonia, promoting a life of mutual respect and understanding, has led to a number of priorities being identified by the King Baudouin Foundation and the Foundation Open Society Institute Macedonia, which focus on the following:

- building and maintaining trust;
- getting to know each other (through traditions, culture, religion, language);
- tolerance, dialogue, consolidation of democratic values, respect, coexistence, and the preservation of peace;
- detecting and supporting new initiatives (of civic groups);
- NGO networking and informal civic groups;
- civic and democratic education.

Within the non-governmental movement in Macedonia, it is necessary to strengthen NGOs' abilities to articulate people's concerns and their capacities to conduct more wide-ranging activities. It is also essential to improve the promotion and publicity of NGO activities, to empower civil society, to develop new leadership, particularly among young people, to work at community level and to work proactively with donors. Of particular importance is the ability to speak "others' languages", to understand partners' rationales, interests and incentives and on that basis to identify the common interest of the multiethnic community. That is the sustainable way of improving inter-ethnic dialogue, of creating networks of NGOs and other community stakeholders, of establishing good communications with the media and of changing their approach towards a more democratic one.

“(…) It is quite evident that the approach and the words used by the media in Macedonian are different from those in the Albanian language, so the impression is that they cover different events, two different (and opposed) realities. Yet the differences in terminology are merely a reflection of the cultural gap, an element that is most obvious from the way each makes the other look like a demon. Media audiences are more or less aware of this, but usually incapable of bridging over it. The narrowing of this information gap is primarily the task of journalists and the media. But it is possible only if the reporting is not identical to the formal statements of different sides and, furthermore, if hesitation and professional suspicion are not just reserved for those of the other ethnic community.”

Klime Babunski, Macedonian

The media play a major role in the process of restoring trust and mutual respect. They should and can be the carriers of positive messages rather than those who stir up hatred and distrust. The media can also promulgate better understanding of the cultures of the respective ethnicities. It is for this reason that the media will be a focus and a target group for the Programme Improving Inter-ethnic Relations in Macedonia.

In addition to NGOs and local communities, the programme will also focus on target groups of different ethnic backgrounds, different ages and gender (children, youth, students, women, unemployed, teachers...). Children and young people in particular can become the carriers of positive change and we must therefore enhance leadership among the youth and strengthen their potential for promoting positive values in their rather hermetic communities. The young have both the power and the potential to improve inter-ethnic relations in Macedonia.

“Finally, a few words about hope. The children of my street continue to play ball, regardless of the sounds of arms, the constitutional discussions, the Prime Minister’s, President’s or leaders’ statements, the role of the international community and the manner in which the media cover it all. Strangely enough, the children have neither participated in seminars, nor have anyone sponsoring their inter-ethnic tolerance project. Regardless even of the fact that, in the evening, bombs fall around their playground, the next morning the children behave with great dignity as though nothing had happened. And even when they get into a fight about some misunderstanding concerning a petty foul – they do it in multiethnic camps.”

Besim Nebiu, Albanian



Romania

“The creative partnership”

The *Ethnocultural Diversity Resource Center (EDRC)* is a successor to the Ethnic Minorities Programme of the Open Society Foundation Cluj Branch, which had been administering the “Improving Inter-ethnic Relations in Southeastern Europe Programme” since 1996.

In 2000, the EDRC initiated and facilitated the establishment of a creative partnership with three other organisations in order to combine resources, skills, beliefs and learning in this challenging programme.

The EDRC is responsible at country level for the overall management of the project and liaison with the partner donor organisations (the King Baudouin Foundation and the Charles Stuart Mott Foundation) and the partner organisations, the Romanian Association for Community Development (RACD), the Pro Europe League and the GAMA Foundation.



The *Romanian Association for Community Development (RACD)* developed the community assessment strategy and criteria. It also selected and trained the community facilitators and provided direct assistance in all the facilitated communities.

The *Pro Europe League* participated in the implementation of the pro-active phase of the grant-giving module. In addition, it advises applicant organisations and implements the training and networking component, together with EDRC and RACD.

The *GAMA Foundation* is mainly responsible for the overall evaluation of the programme. Its input is essential to strategic changes made to the programme.

Romania

Building on diversity

Recent events in the balkans have proved that ethno-politically motivated communities lacking institutional guarantees and solutions for multiethnic co-existence may become sources of tension. In Romania, four years of democratic governance (1996-2000) with the participation of the Hungarians' political organisation have once more highlighted the considerable gap between minorities' expectations and the solutions provided or accepted by the majority. Even the smallest claims put forward by the minorities are perceived as a first step toward segregation by the majority. Likewise, most initiatives that seem acceptable from the point of view of the majority are perceived by the minorities as the first step toward assimilation.

There are now 20 national minorities recognised in Romania, whilst the 1992 Romanian census talked about 18. In 2001, the department for inter-ethnic relations recognised the Macedonians and Rutenians as national minorities.

With regard to the distribution of minorities at community level, the following models are worth considering:

- "minorities in the majority". In the case of communities where the minorities together make up the majority of the population, the problems of minorities and multiethnic co-existence are more likely to concern problems of co-operation with local and county authorities, where the minorities are under-represented.
- "ethnically-balanced" communities. These are communities where the proportion each community represents in the population is approximately equal, so that they face the situation of parallel communities.
- "dispersed minorities". In such communities, minorities represent less than 25-30% of the local population and they are faced either with the threat of assimilation or of living in total segregation (as in the case of the Roma), in which case they struggle to preserve their language and cultural identity.

The inter-ethnic parameters of the situation are nevertheless changing continuously due to the influence of political events:

- In November 2000, a general election was held in Romania, which was won by the Romanian Social Democrat Party. Changes that followed also affected policies towards the minorities. The Department for the Protection of National Minorities was reduced in importance to an office within the newly created Ministry of Public Information. This department was supposed to have had a Secretary General, but up to now (February 2002) no one has been appointed.
- Legislative changes have also taken place. A new law of Local Public Administration was approved giving minorities the chance to use their mother tongue in matters of public administration. This law is applicable in the towns where a given minority represents over 20 percent of the total population. Some voices were raised in opposition, especially among extremists, but the law is gradually being adopted.
- Another law that has created tension and a lot of discussion is the Hungarian Status Law, which grants certain rights to Hungarians living abroad. Romania, the home for an ethnic Hungarian minority of about 1.7 million people, protested vehemently against putting this law into operation. After almost half a year of negotiations and tension between Bucharest and Budapest, the Romanian Prime Minister and his Hungarian counterpart, Victor Orban, signed a memorandum in January 2002, which stipulates the conditions under which Romania's Hungarian minority can benefit from the Hungarian Status law.

Learning on the run: creating the new strategy

Valentin and Janos had not been on speaking terms because of a heated argument some four years prior to our team's arrival in Ogra, Mures. Yet both men were valuable citizens of the village and could, through their combined efforts, contribute even more to the community than if they acted alone. Today, they not only shake each other's hand, they both sit on the steering panel of the local community organisation, where they dream for the benefit of the village, working together to sort out issues that can only be solved through cooperation.

Our undertaking is to nurture multiethnic communities to build their own future, by learning to value their particularities, and to interact and to complement each other, rather like Lego building blocks.

The organisations that we supported during the first five years of the Romanian programme have contributed to the development of civil society. A number of successful projects have been developed in the fields of education (exchanges between majority and minority students), media and the arts, advocacy and information campaigns, as well as documentaries about minorities, all of which aimed to promote inter-ethnic cooperation.

Despite their significance at the level of individual organisations active in the fields listed above, these initiatives did not manage to reach out to grass-root level. Over the five-year period, we noticed that it was the same organisations that won the project competitions we launched, mainly because they had had access to information and the opportunity to gain precious experience in both project writing and implementation. We were happy to see that these organisations could now cope alone and we felt that our mission had been partially fulfilled. We decided to continue our journey, however, and reach out into more direct community work. Past learning and experience of needs assessment showed us the way.

We decided to address some key issues: lack of cooperation in parallel communities sharing the same space, ethnic individualisation within the context of community problems, discrimination and marginalisation – especially in the case of the Roma, lack of support groups at community level and the under-representation of minorities at local authority level, including the police, the town hall and so on.

All four partners agreed to continue with a new programme, aimed at having more in-depth impact and the potential to bring about long-term change in inter-ethnic relations. We chose two ways to implement the programme:

- Firstly through the provision of support *for long term, change-oriented community development projects*. This included an eight-month facilitation process inside the community with the involvement of a facilitator and host organisation. Based on the participatory development of ideas for change in the community, the next step is to provide a grant for the community

initiative. The following priority areas were chosen for this module: the Banat region (Timis and Caras Severin counties), Central Transylvania (Mures county), the Dobrogea region (Tulcea county) and the Chango region (Bacau county).

- The second module focuses on *grants for short-term community interventions*, available to grass root, community-based organisations or for informal initiatives hosted by a public institution. With the perspective of creating a wider impact, this second module is also open to applications for countrywide projects.

The two modules are intimately interconnected through numerous networking and learning initiatives. They are also linked by the magic words of *community development*. What exactly do we mean by this and how exactly did we plan to secure it?

Community development: the complementary link

Within the context of our programme, community development is understood as a set of activities designed to develop local community capacities to initiate and implement self-sustainable activities that are aimed at improving living conditions in the targeted communities.

“Community development” is not about single group development. It specifically aims to facilitate cooperation and coexistence in multiethnic communities and to encourage joint activities. The dream is to create a critical mass of people that will bring about long-term change in inter-ethnic relations at community level through support, to encourage dialogue and communication between different ethnic groups, and to support community development in multiethnic regions.

Facilitation is about motivating members of a community to help themselves, about developing responsible local leaders, building trust and the strengthening of the local institutions. Facilitation and community development are the means to improve inter-ethnic relations through actions leading to greater knowledge and a more ready acceptance of otherness, as well as cooperation to achieve jointly set objectives.

A facilitator’s job is not easy. Sometimes a trip to a village can take up to eight hours, by boat, by bus, on foot, by any imaginable way to move from one place to

another. The seasons can be merciless. A river may freeze and isolate the community for part of winter. People may appear not to respond to you in any way, no matter how hard you try to speak to the people casually leaning against the fence, no matter how hard you try to contact potential leaders. An abundance of patience is needed before the results of your work can even begin to show.

This is a time-consuming process. A change of mentality requires time and effort. Formal leaders – whether accepted or not – are left to do the donkey work and they may choose to do it or to forget about it. The community itself, however, has to solve its everyday problems if its members want to improve their life. Combining efforts for the benefit of the entire community is where the beauty of facilitation lies.

The difficulty of facilitation had been foreseen and this is why each facilitator has a mentor on hand with whom he or she can consult. Mentoring is a support activity for both the facilitator and the community. The mentor's job is to support the facilitator in the design and intervention of an activity, to monitor the evolution of social capital in the community and to offer assistance to the facilitators when required.

During the eight-month facilitation process, the facilitators, who are non-local, visit their assigned community. Sometimes the visit is every week. The facilitators identify and co-opt local community leaders who will assess the needs of the village, they encourage community meetings, where local people seek solutions to their problems and become aware of the power that lies in joint action.

Facilitation and mentoring also embrace emotions and lots of learning, about the communities and about ourselves. As one of the mentors shared with us, *"Here I am at the end of the first trip in my life as a mentor. There is nostalgia, there is happiness, there is relief, there are questions waiting to be answered. Did it all happen as planned? Did events follow a natural path? Was I a valuable help for my younger colleagues? Was I a good mentor?"* In fact, we all often ask ourselves: *What did we learn that was new? Did we teach anyone anything?*

The facilitation process is confined to five counties in four different regions of Romania: Banat (Caras-Severin and Timis), Moldavia (Bacau), Central Transylvania (Mures) and Dobrudja (Tulcea). The criterion for their selection was

the diversity they host, which naturally attracted our attention, given the programme's aim to include as many ethnic groups as possible.

Each community takes its own time

The “special case” of Vasile Alecsandri

As an apparently impossible community to approach, Vasile Alecsandri has been a particular challenge for the facilitation process. It was a closed community, in which new things penetrated with difficulty and human relations paid the price for the lack of communication and inertia, which also dictated the pace of progress. The events that have taken place since facilitation started in Vasile Alecsandri can be considered from three perspectives: the start of the facilitation process, the organisation of the first community meeting and the participation of the community leaders in the course held at Cheia.

Paul, who is doing facilitation work in Vasile Alecsandri, says it started with some difficulty. *“I encountered a community which was divided not only ethnically (Romanians, Aromanians and some Lipovans, a few powerful families), but also materially (the rich and the poor). Adding to the already bad situation was the conservatism of the Aromanians, an ethnic group known for keeping themselves to themselves, for the way they preserve and perpetuate their material and spiritual values, combined with a lack of communication within the community and the fact that the authorities in the commune centre (Stejaru) belong to this ethnic group.”* The Romanians (who represent approximately 30% of the population of the village) feel they are treated unjustly, especially in their dealings with the authorities, which generates a certain amount of inter-ethnic tension in the community. *“Why didn't they pave my street, too? Of course, he is an Aromanian... All the Aromanians are the same”,* says one of the Romanians in the village.

Vasile Alecsandri is definitely a demanding community, but “human flaws” such as vanity have also interfered with progress in the facilitation process. This is why it lags behind the others in terms of the timing for the planned phases. However, what comforts us is that facilitation is able to overcome just such challenges and can remind people of the importance of what is known to be best for the community – let the people deal with the issues and sort them out. Trust the people that they will know what is best for them.

The discovery of nation-wide community initiatives

We have been creative in the other more traditional module of short-term grants, which were made available for national wide projects. Initially, people sent in letters with ideas, so as to avoid preparing lengthy technical proposals, which are sometimes difficult for small organisations. On the basis of the ideas expressed, we visited those who described the most promising initiatives and helped them to develop the projects further. In addition to the traditional grantees (i.e. non-governmental organisations), we also opened up the competition to local institutions such as town halls and schools, excluding only political parties and religious organisations.

Svinita, inhabited by Serbs and Romanians, is a tiny hillside village located amid the picturesque scenery of Mehedinti County, in southwestern Romania. The local Town Hall was granted 600 USD to purchase materials necessary to refurbish the Cultural House in the village. The money and new furniture were certainly helpful, but what finally made the difference to the people of Svinita was getting to know about initiatives in other communities. This community has now decided to host a major multicultural event in the village, in August 2002. By hosting we really mean local families putting up people of any ethnic background who will take part in the summer parade of minorities living in Romania. The involvement of the mayor, the deputy mayor, the librarian and the director of the Cultural House is as important as the villagers' willingness to meet and befriend people who decide to come to Svinita to attend the summer cultural event.



Another novelty was the introduction of a workshop for project applicants. During the first cycle (Year 1), we had noticed that applicants are not experienced in project writing so they need support to be able to present their ideas using an application form. We pride ourselves on the fact that in the second cycle there were twice as many applications sent in as in the first one. We also received a considerable number of applications from areas where we had carried out direct marketing activities about the programme. For instance, in the first cycle we received only two applications from the region of Northern Moldavia, but in year two we had over thirty.

One of the common features of the projects funded in the first stage is that of opening up to inter-ethnic communication, giving up prejudices - especially towards the Roma, creating a generation of positive practice and attitudes towards otherness and building tolerance. Another major achievement is obviously the fact that the relationship between the donor organisation and the grantees has changed radically. Although the community in Svinita, Mehedinti, will derive no financial benefits from the fact that they have volunteered to host the summer multicultural event, they will certainly be a richer community, richer in friends, richer in experience and richer in so many other aspects that are difficult to quantify.

Networking has been of the utmost importance to our programme and represents the point at which our two modules converge. The process began with a meeting of the beneficiaries of each module, to share experiences gained in their communities, to facilitate common initiatives and to overcome communication barriers between different cultures. A year later, we have the spirit of an emerging network. People meet and share experiences, they plan to sell the horses bred in one corner of the country in the opposite corner of the country, they want to meet and organise joint cultural events, they are proud of who they are and ready to accept others pride in who they are.



Challenging bias through acting together

Loredana, a young half-Roma woman, works for an association called Casa Romilor (Roma House) in Ploiesti, Prahova, Romania. Like several other members of the organisation, which also includes the Bulibasha (leader of the local Roma community), Loredana is a student. She remembered how, when she was a child, her parents never cared whether she did well at school or not. Their only concern was to make ends meet.

Loredana believes that the education of disadvantaged children is an important issue, and so she acted upon her belief. The organisation began to involve Roma and Romanian primary and middle school students in a play (an adaptation of Mark Twain's "The Prince and the Pauper") that would be presented in ten schools in Ploiesti, and entered in a number of children's theatre competitions.

The challenges of the project began to show at an early stage. The professional crew from the Puppet Theatre in town, with whom they work, gave the children a really hard time. Discrimination and a lack of ethnic tolerance were obvious. However, as time went by and rehearsals took place, signs of change appeared. The mere fact that young Roma and Romanian students and their parents are involved in a common effort to help make their children's performance a success is a mark of success for the project itself.

Achievements

Looking back, we experienced a time of real learning while working with the communities. It was a year of facing questions, curiosity, mistrust, novelty, positive thoughts, enthusiasm, scepticism, fears and hesitation.

Among the many remarkable achievements of the programme, we should like to mention the following. A team of facilitators and mentors has emerged from the programme. It is actually a new community of people. They have know-how that can be, and is planned to be, transferred to other communities. The programme has also resulted in significant learning from the implementation process itself, during which we have learnt and the programme has been enriched with valuable experience. Attitudes towards otherness, which take so long and so much effort to modify, have been changed in some communities. Of course, there is a huge amount of work still to be done yet, but a beginning has been made. The communities have informal leaders or groups of leaders: cultural, educational leaders, pro-active people whom the community is ready to follow.

A number of community-based organisations have sprung up or are about to come into being. They have vision and missions, they formulate their dreams for the futures of their villages, and they have plans to make them come true.

Through networking, people meet and share experiences. They want to meet and organise joint cultural events. They are proud of who they are and ready to accept the pride of others.

Community issues have been solved. Access roads have been repaired, bus shelters put up, new cemeteries created, children's plays staged, kindergarten roofs repaired, schools redecorated, to name but a few. The fascinating thing is that they were all done together by the people of the community, irrespective of what language they speak, when they celebrate Easter, if they celebrate Easter. They try hard to see themselves through the innocent eyes of their children who are ready to share the stage and accept each other most naturally.

And last but not least, we are happy to have discovered the asset of working in partnership, one that has enriched all four organisations during our journey to open up the spirit of our diverse communities.



Serbia

Bridging communities for nation-wide change



Civic Initiatives (CI) is a Yugoslav, independent, non-governmental, non-profit organisation, established in Belgrade in 1996. The mission of Civic Initiatives is to promote democracy, to strengthen civil society through education and the support of citizens' active participation in the decision-making processes, as means of breaking down regional, national, ethnic, religious, gender and social barriers.

Civic Initiatives networks with more than 600 NGOs in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, as well as but closely cooperating with representatives of trade unions, political parties, independent media, local authorities, governmental bodies and all those interested in building civil society and nurturing democratic values.

Civic Initiatives is involved in a number of activities. In addition to the *Inter-ethnic Programme*, we are engaged in three other programmes: The *School of Democracy* runs basic, advanced and tailored programmes for citizens' groups and government officials, as well as town hall meetings on topics relating to the local community and young people. *NGO Development* comprises training sessions by Tim TRI⁵ trainers in NGO management (basic, advanced, tailored), information distribution and consulting at our *Resource Centre*, the newsletter *MREZA* (Network), and a small grants fund providing financial help to the local groups and initiatives to support these activities. The *Youth Programme* also covers various activities, the most important of which is "*Becoming a citizen*", a programme organised in 30 towns throughout Serbia. This CI programme is also involved in many governmental projects such as civic education in schools and in the revival and animation of the former youth councils.

Civic Initiatives created a network of local NGOs that convene on regular basis (there have been four conferences up to December 2001). It is also a member of the Centres for Pluralism (CFP), an informal NGO network in twenty countries, of the Balkan Human Rights Network (BHRN) and of the CEE Citizens' Participation Network.

Serbia

The country context: key issues and challenges

The state formerly known as the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia has just recently completed its long constitutional redefinition into the union named Serbia and Montenegro. Ethnically speaking, the country is exceptionally heterogeneous. According to the 1991 census (the results of the last census held in April 2002 will not be available before September 2002), 33.7% of the population belongs to minority communities, the most numerous of which are Albanians, Hungarians and Bosniaks/Muslims, accounting for 23% of the total population, or four-fifths of the total minority population.

The minority groups are usually settled in ethnically homogenous groups in various parts of the country, mostly in regions bordering neighbouring countries, except for the Roma, who are dispersed throughout the state territory. This territorial concentration of minorities is the reason for the “local majorities” phenomenon – a situation when an ethnic group that is a minority at national level, is the majority locally. Hence, depending on their location, members of each community could find themselves as a majority, even though they are a minority.

In addition to the above-mentioned groups, there are also members of many other minorities in the FRY: Ashkalians, Egyptians, Bulgarians, Bunjevacs, Tzintzars, Czechs, Gorans, Croats, Jews, Macedonians, Germans, Roma, Romanians, Ruthenians, Slovaks, Slovenians, Turks, Ukrainians, Vlachs.

“The legal framework for minority rights”

Until recently, the notion of a national minority had not been adequately defined within the system of the FRY constitution. Confusion about the constitutional and legal definitions of this notion stemmed from the anachronistic terms, approaches and ideas contained in different documents. This confusion was overcome when the Law on Liberties and Rights of National Minorities in FR Yugoslavia was passed on February 27, 2002. The law gave a more liberal definition to the notion of a national minority, whereby any group that is aware of its singularity in relation to the majority environment should

equally execute its rights, and be entitled to the protection of its identity and culture. However, the circumstances and conditions in which the Law on Liberties and Rights of National Minorities is being implemented are very complex and burdened with the effects of historical, political, ideological, geo-strategic and other factors.

The Law on Liberties and Rights of National Minorities incorporated the highest European standards of minority rights. It provides solid guarantees for the exercise of educational, linguistic, cultural, information and other rights of national/ethnic minorities. For the first time in their history, the Romani community in this territory acquired the status of a national minority, entitled to a full range of benefits regarding the preservation of their language and culture. However, the problems of minorities will not be solved until the practices at all levels of state institutions change and until the majority learns that minority rights are not a “luxury” which can be withheld.

Passing the Law on the Liberties and Rights of National Minorities, the ratification of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and recognition of the competence of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination have together opened up the process of democratic change with regard to the position of minorities. Amending existing laws that regulate minority rights in the fields of education, information, the official use of language and local self-government, should continue this process.

Parallel to the legislative changes taking place is another encouraging step forward, namely a big and very effective media campaign sponsored by the Federal Ministry of National and Ethnic Communities, under the simple name of “Tolerance”. The media campaign is to be followed by round tables in all municipalities with an ethnically mixed population. Civic Initiatives made an important contribution to this campaign with ideas, public speeches and activities and various other kinds of support.

These first steps taken by democratic government are encouraging, but they are scarce and their effects too slow. Given the unacceptably low level of ethnic relations, the pace should be a great deal faster.

“Vojvodina: a possible model”

The level of inter-ethnic tolerance and the quality of inter-ethnic relations not only differ from one region to another, they sometimes even vary from one municipality to another within the same vicinity. The multiculturalism of Vojvodina has nothing in common with the tension in Sanjak or the apparently tolerable life of mixed communities of South Serbia or Kosovo. In other parts of the country, despite enormous regional, traditional and ethno-cultural differences, more favourable conditions are developing to improve the existing state of affairs and the rights of national minorities. Vojvodina, where as many as 24 different ethnic communities live in just the one small municipality of Bačka Palanka, can provide the model for improving inter-ethnic relations in minority communities.

In this part of the country, multiculturalism is not artificially implemented but a way of life, with its infusion of different cultures, traditions, languages and interests. Besides the implementation of a wide range of cultural rights, minorities in Vojvodina take part in local and provincial administration, proportionate to their numbers, and have a direct impact on decisions relating to the interests of minority populations.

The model for the harmonisation and development of inter-ethnic relations in Vojvodina, with its features of integrative multiculturalism, should be developed in other regions in which the exercise of minority rights has not achieved an appropriate level to date. One cannot expect the mere implementation of the provisions of the new Law on Liberties and Rights of National Minorities to resolve the diverse and complex problems faced by members of the Bosniak, Bulgarian, Vlach or Romani national minorities. Improving conditions should be encouraged by strengthening civil society institutions and re-conceptualising the educational system and the media, so as to establish those principles recognised as essential for the stability of multicultural societies: respect for diversity, a strengthened rule of law, the provision of human rights and tolerance as a lifestyle.

Peace and democracy are slowly finding their way to this turbulent region. Notwithstanding, wars in the former Yugoslavia have left deep scars in each and every ethnic community living on its territory and their effects will linger for some time. Despite their proclaimed constitutional rights, ethnic minorities will remember the period during which they experienced discrimination, restrictions on their rights, marginalisation and sometimes even exclusion from public life.

The overthrow of the Milosevic regime through democratic elections in October 2000 brought a new political framework and the beginnings of a new institutional system that should provide for the peaceful and democratic resolution of every case of ethnically flavoured tension, but the process will be neither fast nor easy. Burning issues of economic collapse, outside pressures to cooperate with the Hague Tribunal, hate speeches which still sometimes appear in public life and deep rooted xenophobia and inter-ethnic distance represent a very difficult background requiring a rather special approach.

From strategy to action, despite the challenges

The programme philosophy is to support citizens' local initiatives and priorities that aim to improve inter-ethnic relations in environments where a dialogue between different national and ethnic communities has already started, but also to bridge gaps between them in local communities where such a gap exists. The programme will help to build constructive relations between different groups at local level and thus contribute to their interconnecting.

There are two parallel parts to the strategy:

- To initiate inter-ethnic dialogue through community initiatives involving short-term activities with specific tasks to improve living conditions. By this we mean actions designed to solve local problems that will have an equal impact on the quality of life for all ethnic groups in the community, in fields such as education and the like.
- To create an environment within which long-term changes in inter-ethnic relations can take place, by building local community capacities, by creating a strong network within the country, as well as by linking up with short-term projects designed to generate economic empowerment in the community.

Implementing this strategy requires a great deal of spirit, creativity, flexibility and the ability to respond to rapid changes and needs. We began in the summer of 2001, with the pro-active discovery of two long-term initiatives in Sandjak and in the south of Serbia, two regions which had received relatively little attention to date with respect to inter-ethnic relations. The other projects supported had been identified through a call for proposals widely distributed in the newsletter "Mreza" and through direct outreach to communities. In the course of 2002 and 2003, long-term projects will be continued after evaluation and a new call for proposals will be announced.

A total of 31 project proposals were submitted, developed by 61 organisations. The nine most creative initiatives, coming from the regions of Sanjak, South Serbia, Vojvodina and Central Serbia, were selected and supported. The projects involve ten ethnic groups: Albanians, Bosnians, Croatians, Hungarians, Roma, Montenegrins, Slovaks, Czech, Romanians and Serbs and have been developed by eleven NGOs some of which are minority organisations, some majority, and others mixed. The initiatives reach out to over 1000 final beneficiaries (600 children of different ages, 205 teachers, 215 women) and their duration varies from 3 to 12 months (5 projects last 3-6 months and 4 last from 9-12 months).

Support is about more than just providing funds. In addition to taking help to local initiatives, support also involves bringing the participants together in national events where sharing, learning and joint action can be undertaken.

Our first national event was in September 2001. It brought together representatives from all of the supported initiatives with the express intention of helping them learn from each other. The topics covered ranged from the role of NGOs in civil society, and especially in ethnically mixed communities, to animating volunteers for the promotion of inter-ethnic dialogue. Additional training was organised for accountants from the grantees since new governmental financial policy is very strict and demanding. The second occasion for meeting was the 4th Conference of non-governmental organisations, *The challenges of normal life*, organised by Civic Initiatives and the Council of Europe in December 2001. Representatives of more than 200 Yugoslav and some 40 international NGOs discussed the priorities posed for the third sector in Serbia, among which the draft Law on NGOs was one of the key issues. The last national event of this first year of the programme was in February of this year and gathered project coordinators and assistants to learn more about monitoring and evaluation in general and to discuss how this translates within the inter-ethnic programme.

In the region of South Serbia, where tensions between Albanian and Serbian communities remain, there is still a potential danger of ethnic conflicts and it was with this in mind that Civic Initiatives and the OSCE mission to the FRY co-organised training sessions in the town of Bujanovac. The purpose was to provide organisations and informal groups from that area with basic skills on NGO management and capacity strengthening. The low level of local stakeholder knowledge of civil society values and democracy in practice has indicated the need for continuous and long-term work in that field.

“From communication to interaction”

The team of Civic Initiatives could share with you many stories from the last few years, but we believe that the story set out below is an exciting example of what we hope to achieve through the programme.

Sjenica-Sjenica is a small town in the Sanjak region, close to the borders with Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Its population is ethnically mixed, with around 75% Bosniacs/Muslims, some 20% Serbs and the rest of population belonging to Albanian, Montenegrin and Romani communities. This part of Sanjak is economically underdeveloped since there has been no state investment in its industry for decades and most young people emigrate immediately after graduating from high school. It is not only for economic reasons that they left however: inter-ethnic tensions and war in neighbouring Bosnia and Kosovo influenced their departures, too.

There are only two non-governmental organisations in the area, one a women's group and the other the citizens association “Flores” that is involved in youth programmes. The latter is supported within the inter-ethnic programme for their project “My friend the computer”, whose aim is to provide PC training for teenagers and help them better communicate between themselves as well as with the outside world, a place that seems so far away from their own poor, remote town.

From the very beginning of the project implementation in September 2001, interest of the local community was really high. Almost 400 young people applied for the course but only 240 of them could be trained since there is insufficient technical capacity for additional participants. By the end of March 2002, the trainers had given 1920 teaching classes and the young people had learnt Word, Excel and graphic programmes.

The “Flores” premises became the meeting point for all of the young people, even out of classes. Not only the youngsters, but their parents too, considered the place as a community centre, where many other needs could be met, in addition to acquiring computer literacy. Many parents renewed old friendships, frozen during the politically turbulent time, when nationalists from both sides prevented them from socialising with “the other side”.

Whoever needed any kind of volunteer help could call all day long, knowing that there was always someone young there, to go to the pharmacy or wherever, even during the heavy snow that is so common in this mountainous region. People from the local community knew that they could rely on the teenagers and in return they made many gifts to “Flores”. One local entrepreneur bought them a carpet, another one gave notebooks for all 240 kids, others a fax machine, bookshelves and so on. One small organisation did more to improve inter-ethnic relations in that town than any educational, cultural or governmental institution.

The accomplishments

In February 2002 the external evaluation of initiatives that had been supported was completed. This evaluation, together with our shared experience, feelings and learning over the first year of the programme has given us great optimism. Each initiative can tell the story of an emerging, citizen-based experience in a new approach to rebuilding diverse communities and mutual trust. Every single step in this programme has been a creative experiment, both for the team and the participants in this long-term effort for change.

After the first national training session arranged for programme participators in NGO management skills in September 2001, and given by TimTRI trainers, the trainers' performance was evaluated through questionnaires. All of the comments were extremely positive. One of participants wrote: *"This training 'recharged my batteries'. The support in technical aspects and know-how, provided me with the inducement to continue and gave me new energy and essential knowledge for future work and long-term planning and self-sustenance."* Another one said: *"...it will be a driving force for changes in my NGO and for its empowerment".*

The biggest achievement of the programme, however, is that whilst we are creating capacities at grassroots level we are also building bridges between community initiatives for change national wide. We consider the experience at local level with different ethnic communities as the real background and legitimate basis for action at national level.

Civic Initiatives has succeeded in involving supported initiatives in national campaigns of great importance in the overall path to democracy and strong civil society. The most recent success of the NGO sector in general, within which the Inter-ethnic Programme grantees fully contributed, was the Law on NGOs that will shortly be adopted by the Serbian Parliament. The first draft, made by the Ministry of Justice was absolutely unacceptable to members of the NGO community since it laid down many rules that were inconsistent with the non-profit sector, ranging from over-regulation of registration to the exclusion of provisions for international organisations and the imposition of many new obligations and formalities more typical of the business sector. An NGO task force, together with foreign experts from the Council of Europe used all of their lobbying skills to persuade the Ministry of Justice to accept many amendments to the original draft law, thereby making it appropriate to the needs of the third sector.

Civic Initiatives also contributed to the dissemination of community lessons through its participation in numerous events dedicated to inter-ethnic relations, including conferences on the “Legal status of national minorities, Framework Convention on national Minorities and European Charter on minority languages”, organised by the Council of Europe and round tables on the *Tolerance* campaign.



Instead of “Conclusions”, learning while fitting together the pieces

This programme is a dream to break down the walls of prejudice, hatred and tensions. Our objective is to help build bridges between different cultures and groups. Some years ago we dreamed about a creative approach that could activate wider participation and partnership at local, national and regional levels, one that would encourage innovation and creativity. We also wanted to develop an approach that would challenge traditional methods of financing projects, where strict budget consistency was of greater importance than the final impact of intervention. Our idea, our dream, was to elaborate and implement an alternative process of development assistance, which would focus on ground level impact and learning from practice.

Our learning to date has been invaluable. Reading through the shared stories and experience of our partners in each country, we believe that we are on the right track with regard to the strategy we adopted to address the ambitious objectives of this programme. One of the most important elements in our learning to date is probably our awareness of the great complexity of development assistance. Another is the discovery of a growing body of people and organisations that really do care about overcoming the deep-rooted Balkan heritage, who are capable of identifying individual and community interests and who are increasingly aware of their own potential to contribute. A common awareness of mutual interest is the vital first step towards creating new citizen-based practices in inter-ethnic relations in the region. We have all experienced these lessons, whether working at national coordinating partner level or in one of the numerous communities of people who have chosen to search out their own answers to the Balkan puzzle.

What is unique about this programme is that it *knowingly* takes the time to evolve as a process, to invest in creativity, variety and flexibility. *It is an on-going process of learning in partnership with the communities.* During the last year we have had several regional meetings with our partners, during which we developed our *joint learning notes of what works and what are the challenges in bringing together the numerous pieces of the development puzzle.*

One of our biggest challenges is the multidimensional nature of each country, each district and every community. It is a challenge which can sometimes bring further risks, including ignoring its very presence for the sake of “proper” project implementation and reporting, especially when pressed by the nightmare of deadlines or even under-spending. We tend to forget that discrimination occurs not only between ethnic groups, but sometimes even within a group. Some communities co-exist in parallel silence; others “boil” in tensions. We disregard at our peril the dynamics of a context that could change overnight, a situation where peaceful indifference could so easily be transformed into physical fighting and conflict. Without the sensitivity to appreciate the many dimensions of each and every community, we shall never understand why some of them still hurt from old as well as new wounds and discrimination and why even the most inspired initiative can stumble into an invisible divide of mutual biases...

We must be aware of the differences between rural and urban communities. In rural communities, people tend to be closer, more observant, there are many individual friendships, and transparency is a pre-requisite of trust. In towns and cities, on the other hand, the links which bind communities together have often been broken, rendering them much more susceptible to political or other types of exploitation. In towns, therefore, the process of healing begins with identifying the “urban villages”, the groups that share the same problem or concern.

All of the elements outlined above are further influenced by factors external to the communities. We can only mention in passing here the unpredictable political shifts, the lack of a viable democratic culture and institutions, economic crises and poverty, the vulnerable civil society and the merely embryonic practices of participation, to say nothing of the sometimes mountainous layers of prejudice that can so easily be (and often are) ignited by the media, or provide political justification for nationalistic shifts of attitude.

Our shared learning has taught us that the only way out of the labyrinth is *continuous daily work with the different communities*. It is the day to day work of joint practices that brings about the sustained, albeit slow, dismantling of prejudice, taking small steps, dealing with individual and group attitudes, facing invisible barriers and differences. Such work requires sensitivity,

openness to learning and an awareness of the numerous layers present in each community, group and person. Our work is also about identifying and investing trust in community groups and about promoting individual development so as to create a new type of leader, leaders who are trusted, respectful as well as respected, responsible, communicative, curious and interested in others. Most important of all, our work is about ensuring the equal representation and participation of all ethnic groups and avoiding “local monopolisation” of programmes and access to funding.

Sensitivity to local specifics is crucial to succeed in this type of work, but how do we define success? Our learning shows us that there is no single pattern of signs to denote success. In one community the indication for progress might be the active cooperation of all groups, whilst in another a sign of success may be much more modest. The single identifying feature of success is the “real and sustainable” impact of an initiative.

A common issue identified by all of our partners is the increasing social exclusion and related prejudice against Roma in the region. The Roma are a part of each country strategy and practices in our programme, not only as a “target” for help and support, but also as equal participants in the process of activating diverse communities.

Our programme is nurturing interesting experience with regard to what makes an intermediary organisation successful in reaching out to community level in development projects. By studying the emerging pattern of experience in small development grants and by sharing this experience through networking events, we can help promote successful approaches for other programmes. Moreover, by combining the experience acquired through linking work for community mobilisation with action aimed at changes in policies and attitudes at the national level, we are also providing legitimacy for the process of change.

The programme is also unique in trying to invest systematically in evaluation as an on-going learning process. We understand evaluation not as “consistency of spending according to budget” but as an assessment of real impact against the needs of the community. The steps made both regionally and in-country in this direction provide interesting case histories to be shared with other programmes.

In addition to all of the other lessons, we are learning a great deal as donors too. Many donors support a variety of aspects of civil society in the region. However, very few invest in integrating minorities and human rights issues with respect for other cultures and beliefs as a crosscutting issue for civil society. Those who work for “mainstream” civil society often leave minorities and ethnic issues to those who address minority empowerment and human rights. Sometimes this is reflected in local NGOs’ understanding of minorities and inter-ethnic relations as something “separate” from civil society. It is our experience that an “integrated” approach, which brings together minority rights and community development, is proving its effectiveness.

In ethnically diverse and divided communities, we are all – minorities and majorities, donors and recipients – part of the problems as well as the solutions. It is for this reason that it is of strategic importance to leverage the efforts of various programmes of donors and local NGOs to nurture a new culture of bringing together minority and majority groups around issues of local importance. Such local issues can only be approached and effectively solved through joint efforts in which all the parties realise the long-term benefit for them of all of sustainable solutions. Efforts must go beyond merely defending “citizens’ rights”; efforts must be directed to building bridges between ethnic groups living parallel lives and providing them with long-term interests to continue to live together. This, for us, is the meaning of a “viable culture of civil society” at local level.

The long-term development assistance necessary in Southeast Europe can hardly be provided by distant, external donors. Donors can help implement ideas, put them into practice, but it is difficult for them to generate appropriate ideas. Development blueprints rarely work in the long-term. That is why it is important to invest in local in-country capacities to facilitate development efforts, helping to develop the skills of grassroots groups to identify problems, elaborate solutions, build coalitions of interested parties and to brainstorm and implement ideas through the concerted effort of many. This is our meaning of “activating communities”, providing for the linking and sharing of practices nationwide. We can help, but we cannot do everything “on someone’s behalf”. We can also play another important role, that of advocating nationwide changes in policy and practice, based on the lessons learned at community level and where activities have shown results and demonstrated real impact.

As mentioned in our foreword, the story told in this publication is a photograph, a picture of where we are now. Each country approach has been developed as a three-year strategy. What we have shared with you here is the story of our programme so far, after one year. All of the partners are committed to continue their efforts in this common and important journey and we will continue to share our findings and learning through the coming years.

Contact information

General coordination of the programme

Jan Balliu, King Baudouin Foundation

E-mail: balliu.j@kbs-frb.be

Mariana Milosheva, Regional Consultant to the programme

E-mail: mariana@mbox.digsys.bg

Country Coordinating Partners

For Albania

Human Development Promotion Centre

Rruga "Vaso Pasha", P 9/1, Ap. 4, Tirana, Albania

Tel./Fax: +355 4 253 300

Lindita Xhillari, Director

Violetta Zuma, Programme Coordinator

E-mail: hdpc@icc-al.org

For Bulgaria

Inter-Ethnic Initiative for Human Rights Foundation

9A, Graf Ignatiev Street, 1000 Sofia, Bulgaria

Tel.: +359 2 980 17 16 – Fax: +359 2 980 01 08

www.cit.bg/~inetin.

Kalina Bozeva, Director

Elena Gyurova, Programme Coordinator

E-mail: elena@inter-ethnic.org

For Romania

Ethnocultural Diversity Resource Centre

Street Tebei, 21, 3400 Cluj-Napoca, Romania

Tel.: +40 64 420 480 – Fax: +40 64 420 470

www.edrc.ro

Levente Salat, Director

Mariana Salagean, Programme Coordinator

E-mail: msalagean@edrc.osf.ro

For Serbia

Civic Initiatives

Vlajkovicева 17, 11000 Belgrade, Yugoslavia

Tel./Fax: +381 11 33 43 011

www.gradjanske.org

Miljenko Dereta, Director

Natasa Rasic (till 1 June 2002), Natasa Savic (since 1 June 2002)

E-mail: natasas@gradjanske.org

For Macedonia

Foundation Open Society Institute – Macedonia

Bul. Jane Sandanski 111

91000 Skopje, Macedonia

Tel.: + 389 2 444 488 ext. 108

www.ierse.org.mk

Suncica Kostovska, Coordinator Civil Society Programme

Hajrije Ahmed, Programme Coordinator

E-mail: hahmed@soros.org.mk

Charles Stewart Mott Foundation in Central/Eastern Europe and Russia

The C.S. Mott Foundation is an endowed, nonprofit, and private grantmaking foundation based in Flint, Michigan with a regional office in Prague, Czech Republic. Among other programs, the Foundation awards grants to nonprofit, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in Central/Eastern Europe (CEE) and Russia to contribute to the development of democratic, pluralistic societies. The mission of the CEE/Russia program is to promote and support civil society through three grantmaking objectives:

1. strengthening the nonprofit sector;
2. promoting citizen rights and responsibilities;
3. improving race and ethnic relations.

The Foundation has active in-country programming in Albania, Belarus, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, and Ukraine. The Foundation also makes grants to programs that address cross border and regional issues, as well as those that benefit the entire CEE/Russia region.

Soros Foundations Network

To transform closed societies into open ones and to protect and expand the values of existing open societies is the common mission of the Open Society Network. To this end, the various entities of the Open Society Network fund and operate an array of activities dealing with the arts and culture broadly defined; the strengthening of civil society; economic development and reform; education at all levels and in diverse subject areas; human rights, with special attention to the rights of marginalized groups; legal reform and public administration; media and information, including publishing and support for libraries; and public health.

The Open Society Network consists of 32 autonomous institutions established in countries or regions to initiate or support open society activities. Soros foundations are located primarily in the former communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, as well as South Africa, Haiti and Guatemala. In South East Europe, the Open Society Network has foundations in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia. These foundations are increasingly involved in regional programmes. Increasingly, however, the network has branched out globally to include two regional foundations in Southern and Western Africa that are grant giving in up to 27 African countries.

Additionally, special initiatives exist dealing with issues of global significance (e.g. landmines project and Roma programmes) and programmes that benefit countries where no national foundation exists (e.g. Belarusian initiatives and Burma project).

The national foundations are independent entities with their own boards of directors, staff, programme priorities, application guidelines and grant making procedures. In addition to operating their own programmes, the foundations award grants – principally to local organisations and individuals.

In 2001, the Soros Foundations Network's expenditures totaled approximately \$500 million.

www.soros.org

The King Baudouin Foundation: more than 25 years of service to society

The King Baudouin Foundation is an independent and pluralistic public-welfare foundation which was founded in 1976. At that time King Baudouin, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of his coronation, expressed his desire to create a foundation that would work to improve living conditions for the population.

It is still pursuing that same mission. From 2002 to 2005 we will be focusing our efforts mainly on four programmes. In 'Social Justice' we are seeking to create more opportunities for vulnerable people. 'Civil Society' is intended to give citizens' initiatives more impact. 'Governance' involves people in debate and decision-making on science and technology and on production and consumption patterns. 'Funds and Contemporary Philanthropy' encourages contemporary forms of generosity, provides services to donors and manages named, specific and company funds. Finally we also have 'Specific initiatives' which respond to needs in society or new trends.

Our activities take place at the local, regional and federal levels. We also reinforce the European dimension of our initiatives, since our ambition is to become a European foundation in Belgium. In all our programmes we pay particular attention to cultural and gender diversity. We provide a forum for consultation between experts and citizens from different backgrounds. We use various working methods: we carry out conceptual work, set up our own initiatives and also provide financial support for third party projects. We are engaged in both short-term and long-term work.

You can find more information on our website: www.kbs-frb.be

Practical details, tel.: +32 2 511 18 40, fax: +32 2 511 52 21

or e-mail: info@kbs-frb.be

King Baudouin Foundation, rue Brederodestraat 21, BE-1000 Brussels

